CASTE:

A

STORY OF REPUBLICAN EQUALITY.

BY

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CALIFORNIA

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CASTE.

CHAPTER FIRST.

"Maiden with the dark-blue eyes,
In whose orbs a shadow lies,
Like the night of summer skies.

"Standing, with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

The cold wind of early March was sweeping ragged clouds across the sky; but the cheerless aspect of the evening was little heeded by the guests who thronged Mr. Conant's brilliantly lighted mansion, to witness the marriage of his daughter Julie, a young and beautiful girl, the pet and pride of the village.

In the seclusion of her own chamber the bride was receiving from her attendant bridemaids the finishing touches which made her toilet complete. Having carefully adjusted the folds of the bridal veil, one of them stepped back, and, surveying her work with admiration, said gayly, —

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"There, now, Julie, you look like a little beauty, and I shall expect special thanks for my artistic skill. Isn't she perfect, Mrs. Conant?" she added, addressing that lady, who was placing a delicate spray of myrtle flowers among her daughter's silken curls.

The mother's eyes grew dim with a sudden gush of feeling, and before she could command herself to answer, the door opened and two ladies entered.

"Helen insisted I should come and see Julie, before she went down to be admired and kissed by every body; and so I am here," said one of them, glancing towards her companion, a tall, queenly-looking girl, who added, "Yes, indeed, I told Mrs. Avenel she could not half appreciate you in the bustle and crowd down stairs, and as I wanted one more look for myself, I brought her with me."

"We are very glad to see Mrs. Avenel," replied Julie and her mother, speaking together; and then, after the criticisms on her dress were finished, the former added with a sort of timid earnestness that suited her soft, childlike voice, "Is there really such a crowd down stairs? O, dear, what shall I do!"

"Submit to your fate, my dear; which is, to be the bright particular star of this evening," said Helen Dupré, laughing. "It is said not to be so very disagreeable to be admired, when one gets used to it; so summon your philosophy, and don't faint or shed any tears.

Nobody must cry this evening, for there is no need of it here, and I dislike to see tears at a wedding."

"And having come so far to attend this one, you mean to have things all your own way," rejoined Mrs. Avenel.

"I don't know but I shall disobey you," said Mrs. Conant with a smile, and a voice slightly tremulous, "for I feel already somewhat in 'the melting mood.' Are not mothers always privileged characters on these occasions?"

"Perhaps so; but really I think you have no occasion now for weeping," said Helen. "Is not Julie as happy as she can be? And besides you are about to gain a son, instead of losing a daughter. Think what it would be if she was going away."

At this moment there was a rap at the door, and when Helen Dupré had opened it, her brother entered. He was a dark, handsome man; and when she saw him, the little bride sprang to her feet, with a smile and a blush vivid enough to tell in what relation he stood to her. He looked at her a moment in silence, with an expression of overflowing tenderness and delight; and then assuming a gay tone to hide his deeper feelings, he asked, as he came towards her, —

"Are the arrangements completed, at last? Is the bride presentable? Our rosebud looks as if she was wrapped in a snow wreath, with all this cloud of white about her."

"Don't you like it? Don't you think it pretty?" exclaimed several voices in a breath.

"Like it? of course I do," he answered. "And this ample veil can be made available, too. Draw it around you, Julie; it is large enough to hide you and your blushes, through the whole evening."

As he spoke, he seized it playfully, and would have drawn it over her face; but Julie was no longer blushing or smiling, and at that moment something in her face arrested his hand, even before his sister sprang forward to seize it, and prevent the disarrangement he would have carelessly effected.

"What is it, my pet?" he said in a low tone, as he noticed the sudden paleness, and the large drops that trembled on her lashes, as her eyes were still fixed on his face. "What is it, Julie? Did I hurt you? You must not be sad to-night, my little beauty."

"O, no, Charles," she answered, in a tone which called forth a smile and a tear from almost every one of the group around; "you did not hurt me — it is not that. But I am so very, very happy. It almost frightens me to think how happy I am."

Charles seized her hands, and pressed them to his lips, as he bent down and whispered something in her ear; and just then a noisy summons came to them from Master Ned Conant, the only son of the family, who, gliding through the half open door, exclaimed, —

"Why don't you come down stairs? Every body is waiting, and the minister is here. Julie, you look *first rate*. What's the matter? You needn't be so frightened.

You'll only have to stand up five minutes, and Mr. Blank will marry you *just as easy!*"

The comical drawl with which the last word was spoken seemed very persuasive; for with an instant change of mood, the whole party moved to the anteroom, where the groomsmen waited, and after a few moments' conversation, arranged themselves for the walk to the drawing rooms. As the escort passed down stairs, Ned, who lingered beside Charles and Julie, whispered encouragingly, —

"Don't tremble so, little sis; you'll find you're married before you know it. Charles, couldn't you whistle 'Old Hundred,' or some other lively tune, to keep up her spirits till it is over?"

"What! really packing your trunks? I half hoped they would persuade you to remain longer," said Mrs. Avenel, as she opened the door of her friend's chamber, a few days after the wedding, and saw the array of dresses and boxes that gave token of departure.

"No," replied Helen Dupré, looking up from her labor with a glowing face, "necessity admits of no persuasion, and having accomplished my mission here, and helped transform my little Julie into the prettiest bride in the country, to-morrow I depart for the pleasant south land,

'Where skies are bright, and flowers are fair.'"

Her voice was full and clear as a nightingale's, and the warbled strain with which her words ended seemed to gush forth as naturally as song from a bird.

"You are enthusiastic," replied Mrs. Avenel, smiling, as she threw off her bonnet and shawl, and began folding some of the articles that were spread on the sofa near — "very enthusiastic you are, Miss Helen. Even for the sake of hearing you sing it, I wouldn't have you add the next line of the song, —

'For O, I pine, I perish here.'"

"Indeed, I hope not," added a gentle voice by her side, "for by and by, when we go to housekeeping, I shall insist on having Helen come and live with us."

"Hear the child," cried Helen, laughing; "it has been two days married, and it gives itself airs already, and talks of the dignity of a householder."

"Hear the old maid," retorted Julie, half pettishly; "she pretends to be so much in love with school keeping that she won't promise to leave it, even to please her brother, who loves her so well."

"Or little Julie, whom she loves so well," replied Helen, throwing her arms around the slight, girlish figure of her young sister-in-law, and half smothering her with kisses. Julie extricated herself, blushing and laughing, and with her golden curls all dishevelled; and then, turning appealingly to Mrs. Avenel, she said, "Isn't

she obstinate? She will go, in spite of all our persuasions, and she knows we had so much rather have her at home."

"Don't appeal to her, for she knows my decision is right," said Helen cheerfully, but firmly. "You and Charles must be satisfied with each other for a while at least, and leave the schoolmistress to return to her vocation. It is a pleasant vocation, though you do not think so, little Julie, and I am far happier there than if I were spending my time in idle dependence on my brother."

"But why not pursue your vocation nearer home," said Mrs. Avenel, "since your friends desire it so much?"

"Perhaps I may, at some future time, but now I have really no desire for change. It is pleasant to be here, but my brother needs me less than ever, now he has a wife, and I have been so long with Mrs. Warner that my home there has grown dear to me, and little Emma Warner is the loveliest child you ever saw."

"She was named for Mr. Avenel's mother," said Mrs. Avenel. "She and Mrs. Warner have always been very intimate friends."

"Yes," replied Helen, "and I think the child is like her namesake. What a gentle, lovely woman she is!"

"She is, indeed, and the last time she visited us, she seemed more cheerful than I had seen her before for many years. Now she has recovered from the first shock of her husband's sudden death, she is recovering also from

the petrifying influence he used to exert over her. You did not know him?"

"I only saw him once, two years ago, when I first went to Mrs. Warner's — he came there with his wife to dine one day. But they say Mrs. Colonel Bell is just like him, and she is a perfect incarnation of pride and selfishness."

"She is still very beautiful, I suppose?" asked Mrs. Avenel, musingly, while the shade of sad or disagreeable recollections passed over her face.

"Beautiful! yes, but *so* haughty and cold. I shall never forget how astonished she was, to find that Mrs. Warner intended to regard the governess of her grand-children as an equal and a friend. She is obliged to treat me civilly when we happen to meet at her mother's, — where I go very often with Mrs. Warner, — but she takes good care to let me see that she is condescending to do so, and I take equal pains to make her understand that I consider myself fully her equal, in every respect. You smile, Mrs. Avenel, but this is not pride in *me*; it is only a commendable self-respect."

"There is a difference, I admit," replied her friend.

"Nobody would venture to affirm that Helen was proud," said Julie, with an arch glance from her blue eyes; "no, she is neither proud nor obstinate, in adher-ing to her decision to leave us."

"True, O most wise Julie," answered Helen. "Call it firmness and independence of character, and you will

get the right words in which to describe this marvellous decision. Listen, little sister, and urge me no more," she added, smoothing the soft curls that were nestling by her side. "Charles is younger than I, and having been but a year in business, before he was foolish enough to marry, — for which, to be sure, I don't blame him, since he had so strong temptation, — I want him to get more firmly established, and what we Yankees call 'ahead in the world,' before he has any beside his wife to support. By and by, when the children come, and these two little hands find themselves failing to supply the demand for care and comfort, it will be time for me to return, for then I can really be of use."

"Nonsense," replied the young wife, blushing violently; "as if I wanted you for the work you'd do! I tell you it is only for ornament we want you; nobody thought of your being of any use."

"Thank you; then I won't come," said Helen, with a smile of fond admiration, as she met the mischievous look that accompanied these words.

"But then," continued Julie, "it is likely you'll be married to some one of your rich southern admirers."

"Nonsense," cried Helen; "rich southern gentlemen don't bestow much admiration on Yankee schoolma'ams. It is only in story books you find such a consummation to their toils."

"O, but you are no common schoolmistress," persisted

Julie. "You, so beautiful, so accomplished — you'll find your *beau ideal* one of these days, fastidious as you are. Or, perhaps, some of my romantic visions will be fulfilled, and you'll find your unknown relations. Don't look sober now, and shake your head at me, for this hope is the only thing that really reconciles me to your sojourn in that far-off land."

"Dream no dreams, little sister," said Helen, her gayety of tone and manner vanishing as she spoke; and just then some one calling Julie, she hastened away, with the quick-springing step of a child.

Helen looked after her, thoughtfully, for a moment, and then, leaving the trunk she had been filling, she sat down in the window recess beside her friend, and said sadly, "I wish Julie wouldn't talk so much upon that subject. She is a thoughtless little creature, and does not seem to imagine that, if the mystery which excites her romantic brain were solved, the knowledge we should acquire might be more painful than ignorance."

"Have you then no curiosity to penetrate the secret of your birth and parentage?" said Mrs. Avenel.

"Very little," replied Helen, "and that little accompanied by a painful, shrinking dread, which I wonder at, though I cannot conquer. Charles does not feel so, it may be because he has none of the vague recollections which haunt me."

"Have you, then, any remembrance of your child-

hood," asked Mrs. Avenel, with great interest. "I have often wished to ask you, but you rather avoided the subject."

"I confess I don't like to talk about it," replied Helen, "and yet I can hardly tell why. I have indistinct memories of living in some tropical climate, in rooms gorgeously furnished, and of two persons whom I used to call papa and mamma; but there must have been some trouble or sorrow in that home, wherever it was, for I have impressions of dread and fear connected with it. The first thing I remember distinctly, is living with my little brother in a small cottage, under the care of an old black woman. Then we must have travelled for some distance by water, for I have confused images of vessels and the ocean; and then we were left at our home in C——, in Mr. Evans's family."

"Did the person who brought you give any account of himself to you, or leave any clew by which he could be traced?"

"None," replied Helen. "He said he wished to place us at that school, and paid a year's tuition in advance. This of course excited no particular inquiry; and Mr. Evans told me, he did not notice until after the stranger had left, that he gave no address and expressed no wish to hear of our progress. Supposing, however, that a letter would soon arrive and remedy this oversight, he felt no uneasiness; but month after month rolled away, and

nothing was heard from the stranger, until the year had passed, and then came a remittance sufficient to cover expenses for another year. And so it went on until it came to be a matter of course, and Mr. and Mrs. Evans began to look upon us as their own children, and to care for the forsaken orphans with a tender kindness which we can never repay."

"And since you were eighteen you have heard nothing from your unknown friend, I think you told me," said Mrs. Avenel.

"Nothing since then. At that time, instead of the usual remittance, there came three thousand dollars, and a few lines, saying no further aid could be expected. As Charles was two years younger than myself, I persuaded Mr. Evans to reserve the most of this sum for his benefit, — to educate and set him up in business, — and my share he is to repay when he gets rich," she added with a faint smile. "Part of the money Mr. Evans spent in travelling and making such inquiries as he thought advisable; but they elicited nothing. We had no clew to guide us, for the money had been sent, sometimes from one city and sometimes from another, though always from the south. I wanted him to go, and he went at my suggestion; but I was almost glad when he came back as ignorant as he went."

"What is it that you dread?" said Mrs. Avenel, after a short pause.

Helen's eyes fell beneath the kind but curious gaze of her friend, and she blushed violently as she replied, —

"I am almost sure that my parents did not live happily together, and sometimes I fear there was sin as well as unhappiness."

"Dear Helen, don't distress yourself with such ideas," exclaimed Mrs. Avenel, repenting the curiosity that had elicited this unexpected reply. "Whatever may have been your parentage, you have won our love and esteem; and your purity and nobleness of character contradict the supposition of the evil you dread. Rely upon yourself and your friends, and don't let your feelings become morbid, and imbitter the happiness life might otherwise bring you."

"I do try to prevent it," said Helen, making an effort to speak cheerfully; "and since I always grow sad in dwelling on the past, you see I am wise in seldom referring to it. Let us talk of something else, now — Julie and Charles, who are such an innocent-hearted pair of lovers, that to be with them gives one a glimpse of the lost joys of paradise — or your husband and children, and your own happy home."

"Here comes my husband now," said Mrs. Avenel, laughing, "and so I have no time to stay and talk of any body else; for he will call for me, and both he and his horse have their full share of the masculine impatience that never likes to wait."

"And, after twelve years of matrimony, you indulge your husband in that same lordly impatience! *Quelle folie!*"

"Twelve years! My dear, what difference does *time* make!" cried Mrs. Avenel, as she hastily donned her shawl and bonnet, and ran down stairs to meet her husband.

"What difference, indeed!" thought Helen, as, having bade them good by, she stood looking after them as they drove away.

> "'Time but impression deeper makes,
> As streams their channels deeper wear,'

and has no power to cloy the happiness of that true marriage." With a sigh, almost of envy, Helen turned away to finish her preparations for departure. Full as she was of hope and courage, her own life seemed for a moment too barren, too incomplete, in contrast with the rich fullness of blessing that crowned her friend.

The conversation which we have related has disclosed much of the life of Helen and Charles Dupré, and little more remains to be told. Mr. and Mrs. Evans, who had been the guardians of their desolate childhood, were teachers of a family school in one of the towns of central New York. Here they had remained until the time referred to by Helen, when, in her eighteenth year, they received intimation that the supplies which had hitherto supported them would cease.

She was then well educated, and accomplished far beyond the usual school-girl standard, and being naturally endowed with strength and energy of character, she determined that the money which accompanied this intimation should be kept as a reserved fund, and from that day she had labored for her own support. At first she assisted Mr. Evans in his school, and then taught in other schools in the vicinity, gradually attaining more and more experience and reputation, until she was invited to take care of the female academy in the town of ——. Mr. Avenel's two eldest children were among her first pupils, and as Mrs. Avenel always endeavored to be well acquainted with the person who was to have a teacher's influence over the young minds committed to her guidance, she soon found in Helen a congenial friend, for whose welfare her generous nature exerted itself in every possible manner.

Charles Dupré had decided to be a merchant, and it was Mr. Avenel's influence that procured him a situation in the flourishing establishment of his friend Mr. Conant, who gave him a home in his family, and afterwards, when the young clerk had proved himself reliable, permitted him to woo and win the little Julie Conant to be his wife.

Two years before the time our story opens, the widow Avenel had written from South Carolina to her son in behalf of her neighbor and friend Mrs. Warner, who was in great want of a governess for two grandchildren left in her care.

Moreover, Mrs. Warner wanted a companion and friend to aid in beguiling her lonely hours; and if a combination of these desirable qualities could be found, no sum of money would be considered too great to repay such services.

Mrs. Avenel knew comparatively little of Mrs. Warner; but she remembered her as amiable and kind hearted, and she was the bosom friend of her gentle mother-in-law, and so she did not hesitate to urge Helen Dupré to accept the invitation.

Helen was fond of excitement and variety, and the invitation came at a time when Mrs. Evans's death and Mr. Evans's failing health had induced the latter to break up his school and go to spend his declining years with his sons, who were married and settled in New York city. Her old home thus destroyed, she had less reason to regret the change of locality, and had spent two very happy years at the south; and now, after assisting at her brother's wedding, she was about to return thither.

Mr. Avenel was one of those noble sons of the south, who, in the face of a host of prejudices, and contending against innumerable difficulties, have been true to the convictions of duty with regard to the unfortunate beings which the laws gave them the power to deprive of the rights of freemen.

In executing his philanthropic designs, Edgar Avenel was much assisted by his generous and high-hearted wife,

who shrank from no sacrifice, and cheerfully endured the privations attending their altered circumstances, when for a few years he was obliged to depend upon his own exertions for the support of his family. The slaves to whom he had given liberty constituted nearly all his available wealth. He had inherited them from his mother, who died when he was very young, and his father was so much incensed at what he was pleased to consider Edgar's childish and unpardonable obstinacy, that he sternly forbade him ever again to enter his doors, and destroying in his presence a will formerly made, informed him that henceforth his sister Clara, the child of a second marriage, should be sole heiress of the family estates.

This sister, a haughty and selfish girl, had no sympathy with his feelings, and little pity for his trials, which she deemed a legitimate punishment for the visionary folly to which he had yielded himself; and the disinherited man would have left his father's house hopeless of any future reconciliation, had it not been for the kindness of his step-mother, who, though she doubted the expediency of his conduct, had the warmest admiration for its self-sacrificing heroism. Mrs. Avenel was a silent and timid woman, and had little courage to oppose the fixed prejudices which her husband expressed so loudly and bitterly; but she hoped to influence him through her daughter, whose nature was more congenial with his own, and whose lightest wish he had from infancy indulged without restraint.

This hope was vain. Clara was secretly too well pleased with the additional wealth and importance thus acquired to plead very earnestly for her brother, and unmoved by her mother's anxiety for Edgar, but jealous of the affection it evinced, she covertly widened, instead of lessening, the breach which had so entirely divided the family. Thus years passed on, and at length Mr. Avenel died suddenly, a few months after he had given his daughter in marriage to a millionnaire; and though in life's last hour there was a natural relenting of heart towards his only son, it came too late to allow of any change in the disposition of his property, the greater part of which had been devised to Clara, and her mother in vain besought her to allow the will to be set aside.

But Edgar Avenel had removed to a large and flourishing town in the interior of New York, drawn thither by the persuasions of a friend of his college days, and induced to remain by the natural beauty of its location, and the facilities it afforded for business. Establishing himself as a lawyer, he speedily acquired reputation and influence, and at length, by a series of fortunate investments, he was placed in such a position, that this final disappointment of his faintly-cherished expectations was not so hard to bear as it would once have been. His father had lived to know that by his personal abilities and exertions he had acquired wealth, and his children were not beggarly dependants on his sister's bounty, as she had sneeringly

prophesied when they parted; and when he was told that his father had forgiven and blessed him before he died, he felt an honest pride in assuring Clara that he needed and asked for nothing more.

But the mother was pained and mortified at the disposition which her child had manifested. Her generous nature was unable to comprehend the heartless selfishness that induced Clara to take possession of estates which should have been her brother's, and her remonstrances were so earnest that she was never fully forgiven for them, but from that time forward was treated with reserve and coldness by the child on whom she had lavished only too much affection.

Helen had nearly finished her preparation, and was strapping her trunks, when the door opened again, and Charles Dupré entered, with his wife clinging to his arm. Between the brother and sister there was a striking likeness, and as she rose to meet him, they might have been taken for models of masculine and feminine beauty. There was the same erect, graceful figure, rather taller in each than the medium size of the sex, the same clear, dark complexion, and large, soft, black eyes. Only the masses of raven hair waved above Helen's broad, low brow, and over her delicate little ears, falling in a few loose ringlets from the gathered braids behind; while Charles's classic head was crowned with a profusion of short, silky

curls; and the lines of the mouth and chin which, on her face, were firm and finely cut, on his were more full and rounding, betokening a more facile disposition, and a spirit less easily moved to anger.

There could not have been found a greater contrast to these two, than the young creature who stood looking up in their faces by the flickering firelight. She had hardly numbered eighteen years, and she looked even younger, for her figure was small and delicate, her complexion pure as a lily, and her golden curls, soft and fine as floss silk, fell over mild blue eyes, that hid beneath their lashes if one sought to gaze into them; and her face was so innocent and childlike in its expression, that while looking at her, one experienced an involuntary desire that a being so pure and so helpless should never be called to encounter the storms of life. Little besides sunshine had she known through the summer holiday of her existence. Every body called her "little Julie," every body petted and loved her, and to all her family it would have seemed a strange and incongruous thing to have seen tears in her gentle, smiling eyes, or sadness on her brow.

CHAPTER SECOND.

"Her eye's dark charm 'twere vain to tell;
But gaze on that of a gazelle,
It will assist thy fancy well;
As large, as languishingly dark,
The soul beamed forth from every spark
That darted from beneath the lid.

* * * *

On her fair cheek's unfading hue,
The young pomegranate's blossoms strew
Their bloom in blushes ever new."

The next morning, Helen left her brother's home. The gentleman in whose care she travelled, accompanied her as far as Wilmington, and from there she was to go on alone. But in these days, travelling has been reduced to a system, and to the initiated, even though she be a solitary female, there is little cause found for annoyance or fear, save in those "unavoidable" accidents which often preclude the necessity of any further journeying in this world.

Therefore it was with a quiet heart that Helen bade farewell to her fellow-traveller, whose business called him to another part of the state, and having secured the good graces of the immense specimen of colored humanity who presided over the ladies' cabin, and made arrangements

for the time when old ocean should assert its prerogative to torment the body and try the soul, she took a book, and ascended to the outer air. It was a sunny morning, and the dark forests which fringe the low shores of the river had just been making their annual abortive effort to clothe themselves with a brighter shade of green, in honor of the advancing summer.

As the rheumatic old boat creaked and trembled on its way, Helen watched the smoke of the turpentine factories lowering along the horizon, the fish leaping here and there above the surface of the river, as if anxious to escape from its muddy depths, the skeletons of dead trees, that rose in ghastly whiteness over the reedy shoals, and wearying at length of the monotony, which even the clear air and the glowing sunlight could not enliven, she established herself in a shady corner, and dropping her veil, gave herself up to the charm of the romance she was reading.

As she changed her seat, a gentleman who had been leaning dreamily over the railing at this side of the deck turned to see who approached, and catching a glimpse of her face before the thick veil had hid it, started suddenly, and half changing his position, fixed his eyes on her with a prolonged gaze that scrutinized every article of her dress, from the crown of her bonnet to the sole of her shoe.

With a half sigh, as if some sad memory had risen

before him, he recollected ... back to his listless watching of the ... bout to express her sur- again and again his furtive glance sought ... turned suddenly figure, and every moment he seemed to grow mor... which was plexed and uneasy. He was a tall, well-formed man, ... with an ordinary-looking, but not unintelligent face, and there was about his dress an air of carelessness that made him look almost untidy, though the materials were unexceptionable and scrupulously neat. One would have said he was a bachelor, of middle age, who had ceased to care for appearances, and was content if comfortable.

Attentively as he had watched her, Helen had been unaware of his notice, and quietly continued her reading, until the shrill whistle of the boat gave token of its approach to Oldtown. Then raising her veil, she was about to watch the passengers hurrying ashore, when her attention was arrested by a faint exclamation near her. She looked around, and for the first time met his look, so earnest and piercing now as almost to startle her.

For one moment he stood like one lost in painful amaze, and then raising his hands slowly, he exclaimed aloud, "My God! it is herself—her very self!"

These words, which were uttered in a voice of sharp distress, completed Helen's terror, and caused several of the passengers who were promenading the deck to pause and look on with extreme curiosity; and one of the gentlemen, whose venerable years and kindness of expres-

CAST—, seeing Helen's confusion, offered her his arm, saying, —

for the time wh— alarmed. Do you know this gentleman, to torme— you speak to him, or would you like to retire to —your state room?"

She took his arm, but did not reply, or move to go towards the cabin. She was fascinated by the wild, dark, glittering eyes, which were still riveted on her face, with a magnetism that agitated her, she scarce knew why. Thus they stood, until the stranger, arousing from his trance of emotion, noticed the curious eyes bent upon him by those around, and with a powerful effort at self-control, which could not entirely quell his perturbation, he said, confusedly, "Pardon me — I know I am rude, but this lady looks so much like one I knew and lost! Who is she? What is her name? Do you know, sir?" he asked, laying his hand eagerly on the arm of her self-constituted protector.

He turned to her an inquiring glance, and she whispered, "Miss Dupré." He repeated it to the stranger.

A peculiar expression, almost like a convulsion, passed over his face as he heard it.

"Helen Dupré?" he asked in smothered tones.

She nodded affirmatively.

"And you are going to the south to reside?" he continued, in a tone that was more an exclamation than a question.

Again she nodded, and was about to express her surprise at being known to him, when he turned suddenly away, and shut himself up in his state room, which was one of the range that opened on the deck where they were standing.

His abrupt departure astonished them even more than his previous manner. Weak and trembling, Helen released the arm to which she had clung, and dropped into her chair. The stranger's kind face expressed only surprise, but she was beginning to feel very much annoyed at being thus forced into public notice.

"It is very unpleasant!" she said. "What can the man mean?"

"It is very strange," replied her friend. "Have you ever met him before?"

"Never, that I remember; and yet," she added, struck by a sudden recollection, "he knew my name, and so he must have seen me before. Do you know him?"

"I do not. I would make inquiries, but I must hurry on shore, for I leave the boat here. I hope you will have no further trouble; but if you do you had better speak to the captain, who will protect you. The man may be crazy."

So saying, he bade her a courteous farewell, and with regret she saw him go away. She pondered in amazement on this strange incident during the rest of the morning; but her mysterious interlocutor did not again

appear, and she had somewhat recovered from her excitement when the whistle again sounded, and the boat drew up to the solitary wharf of the quiet little village of Smithtown.

They were at the mouth of the river, and sweeping far away to the horizon the ocean lay before them; but their further progress was stayed. They must wait for that which waits for no man; for the tide was out, and the sand bar could not be crossed. There was the usual amount of impatience and scolding among the passengers, and then they scattered hither and thither, in groups, sauntering along the shore or through the sandy street, where barren desolation was relieved by a few noble live oaks — the only things in the town which seemed alive.

Helen stood looking out over the scene, when a hand was laid lightly on her arm, and a voice spoke her name. Even before she turned to see who was beside her she recognized that voice, and her heart sent the warm blood with a telltale quickness to her cheek, and her eyes sparkled with a joy that contradicted the quiet coldness of her manner, as, after the first involuntary start of surprise, she said, "Ah, Mr. Hubert — this is unexpected!"

An expression of disappointment clouded his brow at this reception; but when he had cast one quick, searching glance into her face, it passed away, and he answered, —

"Entirely unexpected to *me*, I assure you. It was by the merest chance that I hurried all day yesterday to get

through with the business which brought me here, so that I might take the boat to-day; for I hadn't the slightest idea you were any where in this region."

His manner was such an exaggerated imitation of hers, that Helen could hardly help laughing; and in her confusion she asked him what was the business which brought him so far from home.

"I hardly like to confess it, but I came here to fight a duel," he replied, gravely.

"To fight a duel!" exclaimed Helen, incredulously.

"Yes. The worst enemy I ever had has been annoying me past all endurance, lately; and after having several encounters, in which I was always worsted, we appointed a meeting beyond the bounds of the state. He avoided me for a while, when he saw me so determined on vengeance; but yesterday we met on board the United States cutter, in which one of my friends persuaded me to accompany him from Wilmington to this place, and after we arrived here we had a meeting, which was fatal to him."

"What are you telling me? Can this be true?" said Helen.

"I am sorry to say it is but sober truth," replied he. "I have suffered much on account of it, but it is over now."

"And you have killed him?"

"I have killed him!"

Helen looked at him with surprise and distress, uncertain of the truth of this narration, and yet half convinced by his manner.

At length she asked, "Did you meet him alone? Were there no witnesses?"

"We had our seconds, of course. Every thing was conducted in the most honorable manner. His friend's name was Light — a Mr. Light, commonly called *Sun* Light, who enabled my opponent to hold his own for many hours against me. My friend was a Mr. Hope."

"O Hubert," exclaimed Helen, "you are quizzing me. Who was your opponent?"

"It was a French gentleman — M. Le Temps," replied Hubert, the gravity he had hitherto maintained giving way to a most comical expression. "I have met him before, but he never proved himself such an intolerable bore as during the last six ——, six what? Is it months or years that you have been gone?"

The rich bloom of Helen's cheek deepened, but it was impossible to resume the reserve and coldness out of which she had been so skilfully drawn; and after a moment's effort she yielded, and joined in the hearty laugh which her companion could no longer restrain.

"Come, now," he continued, "you are glad to see me; you know you are; and I have come some distance to see you; so why can't we enjoy the pleasure of our meeting, a little while, without taking thought for the future?

Friends shouldn't quarrel the first thing, who have been separated six months."

"Six weeks, you mean," said Helen.

"It don't make much difference what one calls it," replied he. "I am prepared to believe in any unlimited quantity of time having elapsed since I saw you last; and the moment I heard that your friend was to leave you at Wilmington, I started to meet you there, for I don't think it is proper for ladies to travel alone."

"How did you discover so much about my plans?" she asked.

"How? Don't you believe in magnetism? Don't you believe in clairvoyance? Don't you believe in spiritual communion, or in little birds that fly through the air to tell secrets?"

"No, I haven't a particle of faith in either," said Helen, laughing and shaking her head, incredulously.

"Well, then, don't you believe in little children — dear, innocent, artless little angels that they are — who are always playing about, with such apparent unconsciousness, while their elders read letters and make remarks, and yet retain a perfect recollection of all that is said, and are so easily induced to impart their knowledge when sagaciously tempted by one who knows them?"

He laughed as he said this; but Helen looked grave, and after a pause said, with some embarrassment of manner, —

"I have not yet inquired for your mother and the family. Are they well?"

"All well — elders and youngsters, white and black; and sent all sorts of messages and greetings, which you will please take for granted, since I have forgotten every one of them."

"Then they knew of your coming," said Helen, her face brightening.

"Yes, and approved of it entirely — which I presume you wanted to be satisfied of," he added, with another of his penetrating glances, that always divined her thoughts in a moment. "Come on," he continued; "let's sit down here and have a chat, while the boat is waiting. Tell me what you were thinking about, that you looked so very, very grave just before I spoke to you. If I had not watched you for a moment then, and seen how your face changed when you heard my voice, I should have been entirely disconcerted by the manner you saw fit to assume in greeting an old friend."

The gentle reproachfulness of these last words thrilled through Helen's soul, with a power which, in spite of her self-control, for the moment utterly confused her; and glad of any escape from her embarrassment, she eagerly seized upon his first suggestion for relief. Leaning over the railing of the boat, as they seated themselves, she pointed out over the waste of sand bars, which lay spread between them and the ocean.

"I was thinking," she said, "how well this place has been named 'Cape Fear;' for a more desolate and terrible looking place can hardly be imagined. See how the ocean vexes itself into madness against the further boundary, and how the crawling, cruel, hungry-looking waves are gliding swiftly through all the shallows, and gnashing their white teeth at us from behind the sandy barriers."

"I see," said her companion; "but to me the waves seem only bent on a hurrying, scrambling frolic, to prove which shall first cover this level waste. This fresh breeze which caps them with foam, and the bright sunshine that glitters over them, exhilarate and enliven me: why do they bring to you only images of terror? I think it is grand, glorious."

"I think it is horrible!" returned Helen, with a shudder. "I have no sympathy with the ocean, and the very sight of it depresses me. Its mysterious depths, filled with slimy, shapeless creatures, the hoarse, distressful voices that murmur in its undertone, the resistless force with which it lifts itself up against whatever opposes it, fill me with an unspeakable dread. If I were a heathen, I should worship it with awful sacrifices, as the personification of remorseless, relentless Fate."

"What a mood you are in!" exclaimed her friend. "No wonder you looked grave, if you were brooding over such fancies. Something must have happened to annoy you. What is it?"

"Something did annoy me," replied Helen, "but that had nothing to do with what you call my fancies. They always arise at the sight of

'Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste.'

Of all the poetry which has been written, that line seems to me most truly descriptive of its object, and others must have the same opinion, for many images of overwhelming sorrow and destruction are connected with the sweep of the billows."

"The real cold salt water is something to be afraid of, I grant you," said Hubert, "and woe betide the unlucky sailor caught on these shoals in a storm; but as to these imaginary seas, I believe people are seldom drowned in them. The conceit is often more than the reality."

"Yes," said Helen thoughtfully, "I know it is often so. We see the waves plunging onward, rising and swelling with a force that threatens destruction when they shall reach us, and yet when they are past we find ourselves riding triumphantly upon the surface, or at worst only partially submerged."

"In other words," said Hubert, with a mischievous smile, "if I may place common parlance beside your metaphorical language, people don't often die of grief unless some other disease sets in. Am I rude to say this, after your pretty bit of poetic imagery?"

"No," said Helen, laughing and blushing, "it does Pegasus good to be compelled sometimes to trot with

common ponies; and since you are determined I shall not be sentimental this morning, let me tell you of a little adventure I have had."

"I am determined you shan't be *gloomy*," replied he; "so turn your back upon the sea, and tell of your adventure. It annoyed you, you said."

"Only a little, and perhaps no harm was intended," she said. "There was a gentleman on board who appeared to recognize me, and yet seemed so surprised and agitated that he almost frightened me. There he is now," she added, suddenly lowering her voice, as the person referred to opened the door of his state room and came out.

He did not appear to be coming towards that part of the boat where they were sitting; but when he saw him, Hubert exclaimed, "That gentleman! it is Colonel Bell, our neighbor;" and hearing the sound of his voice, the stranger looked around, and recognizing him, came forward to greet him, and was presented to Helen. She looked at him earnestly as he pronounced her name; but whatever had caused his excessive emotion, all traces of it had now disappeared, and though her manner was somewhat confused, he was calm, as if he saw her then for the first time.

She could not understand it, and began to doubt the evidence of her senses, when he gradually joined in the conversation that ensued, with an ease which gave no indication of the storm of feeling that had swept over him.

She might indeed have concluded it had been the result

of some mistake, of which he was now convinced, and that his mention of her name was a mere coincidence, only she noticed how adroitly he led her at length to speak of herself, her past life, her present prospects, and of her brother and his beautiful young wife. His manner was deferential, and the tact with which he elicited all he wished to know, and yet told her nothing, amused, while it provoked her. She was glad when the boat left the wharf, and she could make the dread of sea-sickness an excuse for leaving them. Comfortably located in her berth, she had leisure for thought and self-examination. Her impressible nature had been much excited by the various scenes and events of the day, and her proud, passionate heart had been stirred to its depths by her unexpected meeting with Hubert Warner.

Although she had been two years an inmate of his father's family, her acquaintance with him had been recent. He had left home soon after her arrival there, and during the few days they were together, amid the new scenes and faces surrounding her, she had hardly thought of him. But even then, her dark, splendid beauty impressed him so deeply that he did not forget her while absent. Returning three or four months previous to this time, he had found his admiration fixed and augmented by the more full acquaintance which the freedom of domestic life allowed, while her warm, quick feelings, that threw an exquisite gentleness over her natural dignity of

manner, and her poetical temperament, keenly alive to the aspirations of nature and art, awakened emotions warmer and more enduring than mere admiration.

But Helen was proud, and though treated with respect and affection, and almost with the familiarity of a daughter, by Mr. and Mrs. Warner, she knew too well that her position as governess was considered one of inferiority by the aristocratic families around, and that it was thought an act of condescension in them to allow her the place in their regard to which she considered herself entitled. She had no vulgar ambition to attain a position among those who fancied themselves her superiors, and she shrank with disgust from the suspicions and innuendoes which began to reach her in various ways, as soon as Hubert Warner's return was known, and steeled her heart against him as the remote cause of that which had annoyed her. Perhaps her reserve, and the indifference, which he saw was unfeigned, only piqued him to more assiduous attention, and made her society more attractive. Opposition was pleasant to a man of his strong will and energy of character, and he made it a study to find out how to interest her, and compel her love.

The affinity which exists between certain contrasting qualities aided him in this respect. His calmness gave him power over her excitable temperament; his social, mirth-finding disposition opposed pleasantly the tendency to sadness inherent in her own; and his strong common

sense strengthened and refreshed her, though it often audaciously dissipated her day dreams; while in intellectual culture and æsthetic taste they found many points of sympathy.

Yet he had talked little of love. Satisfied with the enjoyment of the present, he had not dared risk his hopes for the future, until he had more secure hold of the secret springs of thought and feeling; and Helen had left him to attend her brother's wedding, without hearing the words which she expected and half hoped for, as a means of release from her embarrassment. She had intended to reject him, and had an opportunity occurred, she would probably have done so, without at all realizing how much the hope and happiness of her life were bound up in him. But with absence and change came other emotions — mortification that she had mistaken him, and the sting of secret pain, in a fear that she had betrayed the expectations his manner had raised, and that he had been amusing his vanity at her expense, mistaking the feelings with which she regarded him.

But what then! Why should she care for his opinion? Ah, there was the keenest stab of thought. In her inmost heart she realized now how she had deceived herself, and she awoke to the chagrin of knowing that the hours of her careless girlhood, the calmness of her proud heart, had passed away, leaving in its place only the trembling and the shame of an unacknowledged affection.

She struggled against it, she put it bravely down, she ignored it, and longed impatiently to return to his home, that she might convince him also how little she cared for him. She had pictured to herself how coldly and proudly she would meet him; and now his unexpected coming, his quiet assumption of their old friendship, had baffled all her plans. But what could she do in this delicate dilemma, and what reason could she give him for coldness and reserve?

Wearied with these thoughts, at length she fell asleep. The beams of the rising sun, glancing along the ceiling of the dusky cabin, first roused her from her slumbers; and as she lay dreamily listening to the confused noises around her, she was sensible of a dark form which obscured all the little space before her berth, and a large, hard hand passed slowly over her face, resting upon the eyelids with a weight that would have crushed out sleep, if sleep had been lingering there. Starting back with a faint exclamation, Helen drew aside the curtain, and saw the presiding genius of the cabin, Aunt Rose — "coal black Rose" she might have been called with truth, for she was a perfect mountain of ebony, and her immense hands and feet were only in proportion to her burly figure. A bright red turban bound her brows, and beneath it her small round eyes were twinkling and peering, and her face had a ludicrous expression, as she exclaimed, —

"Thank de Lord! she done woke up at last. See

here, miss; your husband up star dere, he want you mighty bad."

"My husband! I have no husband," said Helen, in amazement.

"Well, den, your beau — he must be one or toder, he so despit onpatient. He been at me dis half hour, — 'Aunt Rose — Aunt Rose' — till I's 'plexed out o' all patience myself. Come, miss, do get up, and I'll help you dress."

"I don't want to get up yet," said Helen, much amused. "Go tell the gentleman I'll come by and by."

Aunt Rose gave an impatient shake of the head, and twirled her mountainous form completely around on one heel, with an ease which would have done credit to a dancing girl. Then seizing Helen's hands in one of hers, as if about to drag her out of bed, she exclaimed, "Now don't, miss — don't send me back wid dat word; for he's jest *ravin'*, and dere's no knowin' what he'll do to you when he do get hold of you, if you don't come now. You know what de men is when dey's in a hurry — dey do kick up boberations."

Her gesture of warning was so comical that Helen laughed outright. "There is no need of hurrying," said she; "we are not yet over the bar."

"No, miss, but we's mos' up to it; and besides, he *wants* you; and you know, miss, dese men, when dey wants any thing, 'pears like dey *mus' hab it*, and all de

women hab to stand round till dey gets it. Come, miss, tain't no use waitin'."

"What does he want of me?" said Helen, rising lazily on her elbow to look at her watch; "is there any thing along shore to look at?"

"Now hear de woman! jes' hear her!" exclaimed Rose, throwing up her arms, and fidgeting through all her huge frame with a vehemence that threatened serious consequences to the fastenings of her scanty cotton dress. "Hear dis woman talk! Got a *beau* up stair to look at, and axing me what *dere is to see!* Bless my soul — I's done beat now!"

This burst of pathos was irresistible, and, helpless with laughter, in which she was joined by several of her fellow-travellers, Helen allowed herself to be raised from the snug little berth, and Rose assisted her in dressing; fuming and fidgeting all the time at "dat impatientest man," whose loud, cheerful call, penetrating at length the depths of the cabin, assured her that Rose was not mistaken.

"That stupid nigger!" was Hubert Warner's first exclamation, as she came into the saloon where he awaited her; "I thought I never should make her understand which lady it was I wanted. There has been such a splendid sunrise, and I was determined you should see it; but she didn't get you up soon enough."

"I thought you must have been more than usually

impressive," replied Helen, "for she seemed to be penetrated with the idea that I must be got up, whether I would or not."

"It took something more material than an *idea* to penetrate her thick skull," said Hubert, laughing. "I gave her a shilling to be sure and find you, for I didn't know that she would try otherwise."

They went out on the deck together, where they were soon joined by Colonel Bell, and some other gentlemen with whom Hubert had formed acquaintance.

The morning was fine, and when they had passed the bar, the low, verdant islands of Charleston harbor breathed a welcome from their palmetto groves, in balmy, flower-scented airs that are more than ever delightful to one coming from the chilly winds of a northern spring.

Colonel Bell sought to converse with Helen, and his manner evinced a tender regard for her, and a deference to her opinions, which almost disarmed her of her prejudice against him. He talked well of the world of letters and the world of men, both of which he had studied much, and unconsciously she was led to express many of her own ideas and feelings, to which he listened with an eager interest, quite unlike the usual careless courtesy of a passing acquaintance.

Before they left the boat, he found an opportunity, amid the bustle of landing, to speak to her unheard by others. Taking her hand, as if to bid her good by, he

said in a constrained manner, looking at her anxiously the while, as if to read her thoughts, "You must have thought my words and my actions alike strange, during our first interview yesterday morning."

"I was surprised, indeed," replied she, "but supposed you had mistaken me for some one else."

She spoke in an inquiring tone, and he cast down his eyes, and answered in an absent, hesitating manner, like one in deep thought. "I could explain it to you—if it were best—but not here—not now. You must not let what I said trouble you. Think it is all a mistake, and forget it."

"I shall be glad to do so," said Helen, "for if I thought it any thing but a mistake, I should be much troubled. You seemed so much in earnest, that I don't know but I ought to demand an explanation, at any rate."

"No, no; think nothing of it," he replied, hurriedly. "I have a nervous manner when any thing comes suddenly, and you reminded me so vividly of the past—but I cannot explain now. Mr. Warner is coming for you, and I see the carriage waits. Probably we shall meet again soon, and then——"

Whatever he might have said further was lost in the loud roar of the escaping steam, and in another moment her hand was drawn through Hubert's arm, and she found herself amid the hurrying crowd on the wharf. A rattling, racing drive brought them to the depot just in time

for the cars, and after a ride of several hours, they stopped at the station where a carriage was waiting for them.

It was a heavy, old-fashioned coach, that had evidently done good service through one generation at least; but it was capacious and well preserved, and the family would as soon have thought of discarding the roof that sheltered their infancy, as of exchanging it for a more modern vehicle. Upon the box sat the coachman, listening with an air of conscious dignity to the various remarks made by a group of idlers, who were examining the silver-mounted harness, and speculating upon the good points of the pair of powerful horses, whose impatience could hardly be restrained by his occasional word of command.

When he saw his young master and Helen getting out of the cars, he left his elevated seat, and came forward, followed by the footman, who had been loitering among the bystanders.

"How d'ye, John? Rafe, how d'ye? All right at home, I suppose," said Hubert, holding out two fingers of each hand to them, as they approached. Rafe grinned, and pulled awkwardly at his old cap; but John made an elaborate *congée*, and replied with slow, pompous gravity, "Our folks all has dere health bery well, Mass Hubert, and say tell you how d'ye for every body."

"Well, bustle about, and get the luggage on, and we'll be off," said Hubert, cheerfully.

With a gesture of authority worthy of an autocrat, John directed Rafe's attention to the trunks on the platform behind him, and then returning Helen's pleasant greeting by a dignified bow, he walked before them to the carriage, and opened the door for her to enter. But at that instant, a diminutive form, starting suddenly through the window, alighted, apparently on his head, and turning a somerset, stood quietly before them, cap in hand, made one or two little bows, and then crossing his arms behind him, gave a slight sigh, and said demurely, "I comed over."

"Cæsar Augustus! I should think you did," exclaimed Hubert, laughing. "What did you come for?"

"Dem two niggers coaxed me," replied the mite of a fellow who owned this high-sounding name, rolling up his eyes, and ducking his head at John, who stood holding open the door, and, now, vexed beyond measure at this unexpected allegation, exclaimed, "De liar;" then touching his hat deferentially to Hubert, he added, "Massa knows dat I never wouldn't hab allowed no sich — neber — and dat chile, for a small boy, do tell de most *extensive* lies."

"No matter, John," said Helen, smiling, "we all know what Flibertigibbet is."

"If I had my way," pursued John, "dat are chile should be larnt some manners. He neber did *behave* one

minute since he was born, and he don't hab de leastest respect for his betters."

As he spoke, he shook his fist at the boy slyly, while Hubert assisted Helen into the carriage; but the child spun around several times, with comical gestures of defiance, made a succession of somersets, and then diving between the horses' legs, reappeared on the other side, and with one bound perched himself on the top of the forward wheel, as cool and unbreathed as if he had not moved a muscle.

He was so small, so black, with such quick little movements, and such a funny little round head, that at first sight one hardly knew whether to think him one of the human race.

The trunks were strapped, the footman had taken his stand upon them, and the coachman had mounted his box; but still Cæsar Augustus sat composedly striding the wheel, and chattering through the window to Helen of various household news, until the moment when the horses started. "Take care!" cried Hubert, as he saw the preliminary gathering of the reins.

"De debil looks out for *dat* boy," muttered John, without turning his head, and off the horses started; while the event served to justify the belief in supernatural protection of some sort, for the boy at the same instant caught at the loops by the windows, swung himself from

his dangerous position, and clambered to the top of the carriage with the agility of a monkey.

"Not there! not there! come in here with us." Helen had called to him unheeded, and now Hubert repeated the command in a more peremptory tone, as he remembered how unsafe was the smooth, unguarded place where he had perched himself.

But a great shout had arisen from the group of idlers around, as they witnessed this last feat, and, chuckling with gratified pride, the boy cried out, "O, neber you mind, massa; I's comf'ble 'nuff."

"Get off that, you monkey," persisted Hubert, half laughing and half vexed. "You'll fall and break your neck, and I won't run the risk of it."

"Neber you mind, massa," shouted Gus; "neber mind 'bout runnin' any risks. I can hold on 'zactly the same ef you don't run any."

"Don't be scare, massa," added Rafe; "dat Gus am sure 'nuff monkey. He neck neber'll break fallin'."

CHAPTER THIRD.

> "A man of consequence and notoriety;
> His name, with the addition of 'esquire,'
> Stood high upon the list of each society,
> Whose zeal and watchfulness the sacred fire
> Of science, agriculture, art, and learning,
> Keep on our country's altars bright and burning."

MRS. WARNER was one of those busy, cheerful, energetic women, who always carry about with them the atmosphere of a warm spring day, breezy and bright; and if she had her clouds and her showers as well, nobody liked her the less for them. With a practical mind and steady common sense, that supplied the place of deep thought or intellectual acquirements, she acquitted herself well in every situation, and managed all parts of her domestic *menage* with a decision and skill worthy of admiration, accomplishing every week an amount of work that would put to shame the *dolce far niente*, and the dissipated idleness of many northern dames in her station of life.

Mr. Warner was much like her, and the business of the plantation was conducted in the same prompt, liberal, cheerful manner which marked the household arrangements.

All their children had married and settled at a distance from home except Hubert, who for that reason had long since been dubbed the old bachelor of the family.

The death of one of their sons, who had been some years a widower, had thrown his children under their protection, and been the occasion of Helen's introduction into the family, where she soon became a favorite with all.

Mrs. Warner was not superior to the prejudices of her class, or free from the trammels of early education, and had a good share of the respect for "family" that seems inherent in southern blood; but her heart was full of kindness, and when she chose to step over the established barriers, she had sufficient courage to do it. She liked Helen from the first, and seeing her real superiority, determined that she should be received in society as an equal; and failing in that, had sustained her all the more zealously in the home circle, where she ruled supreme.

Since she had been absent, she seemed more necessary than ever; and if the young lady had known the thoughts which passed through Mrs. Warner's mind as she stood at the door to receive her, she would probably have replied less coldly to Hubert's very original remark about the shortness of the drive — a reply which caused that gentleman to meet in a most ungracious manner the congratulations of the family upon his return.

"Come out into the kitchen with me and see the new cook," said little Emma Warner to Helen, as they

arose from the tea table, which had been awaiting her arrival.

"The new cook! Where's the old one? Where is Queeny?"

"O, she's gone!" said Emma. "I didn't care much, she was so cross. She never would do what I wanted her to."

"I've exchanged cooks with my daughter Ellen," said Mrs. Warner, as she met Helen's inquiring glance. "Ellen has always insisted that no food ever tasted like that Queeny cooked, and so I let her go. She took her youngest child with her, and was willing enough for the move."

"Come, let's go see them — they all want to see you," said Emma; and with little Angie clasping her other hand, Helen crossed the large paved court and entered the kitchen.

Half a dozen of the servants were collected there to greet her, and she was introduced in due form to the cook — a tall woman, who looked as if she might have been originally made of wood and painted black, but had now become a sort of grizzly gray from exposure to the weather.

"What did you say her name was?" Helen asked Emma, in a low voice.

"Kentucky," said the child, laughing: "ain't it a funny name? That was what I wanted you to see her for."

"How came you to have such a name?" said Helen, perceiving by the shining rows of teeth, displayed in the dark faces around her, that Emma's remark had been overheard.

"Why, miss," replied the cook, good naturedly, "you see, my mammy she's raised in Loizany; and so, when her fus' chile come, she name him arter de ole state, for de sake ob de 'lations she lef' dere. Well, de nex' one she name Mississippi — dey calls him Sip. Den, when de nex' one come, she ax massa for a name, and he laf and say, 'Go it, gal — keep right on wid de states, and when you gits em all in your family, I'll gib ye your time.' So ebery chile come she ax massa what name next, and he tell her."

"Did she get all the states in the family?" asked Helen, much amused.

"Well, miss, dey come on bery well till they come to me. Dey done name me Kentucky, and dey hab mighty tight time getting me raised; and arter dat de picaninnies, somehow dey all die. 'Pears like it's so cold up dare in dem states dey was name for, de children was born wid ager chills."

"Did your mother get her 'time,' after all?" asked Helen, smiling.

"Yes, miss," said the woman, and her face grew sad; "arter good many years she got her time, *wid de good Massa on de old plantation up above.*"

"Has your husband been to see you since I've been away?" said Helen, turning to a trig-looking mulatto woman who stood near.

"No, miss," she answered; "I'se done 'spected him ever since, but he ain't come yet. I dono what to tink 'bout it. He send me word he come sure 'nuff 'bout dat time, ef Probidence permitted and de weather was pleasant; and I dono what de reason, I ain't seen him. He lib twenty miles from here, you know, miss," she added, apologetically.

"Yes, that is almost too far for him to be able to send you word what has detained him," said Helen, "and I reckon you'll see him before long."

"Thank'ee, miss," said the girl, evidently pleased with her sympathy. "Sometime I'se scare, p'raps he sick."

"You needn't be scare *o'dat*," said one of her companions, a little roughly. "He send you word what de matter is."

"He didn't — dat all a lie," exclaimed the other, turning quickly, while her eyes filled with tears of mingled grief and anger.

"What is it?" asked Helen.

"Nothin', only Michel send Kissy word he done gib her up, and she might get n'oder husband, and she won't b'lieb it."

"He didn't neber send no sich — I know he didn't. He good honest boy, and I'll see him yet," persisted Kissy, vehemently.

"O laws! what de good of a wife twenty miles off?" said her antagonist. "Michel won't neber eat no more hoe cakes ob your makin'."

But Kissy, with tears running over her face, refused to give up the faith of her woman heart, or believe in the fickleness of her lover; and leaving them in the midst of a storm of words, Helen turned away.

Kentucky had all the time been standing behind the others, and seeking to convey some information by making the most grotesque gestures while they were talking, pointing at Kissy, rolling her eyes till only the whites were visible, and shaping silent words with distortions of the mouth awful to behold; and now she followed Helen as she stepped outside the door, and with a significant jerk backwards, which almost dislocated her neck, she whispered, "De true fac' is, miss, dat Michel is sold."

"Sold! O, dear! What will poor Kissy do when she knows it?"

"Dat jes it, miss; we tinks it'll come nigh to kill her, and so we'se preparin' her mind, 'fore she hears it."

"How?" asked Helen, in perplexity.

"Why, miss, don't ye see. We tells her dis, and she feels so shame, and so mizzable, to tink he done forsook her, and den when she find out de troof, 'pears like she'd take it easier. Kase ye see, miss, de second strouble dat comes aint neber so hard to bar as de first."

In spite of her sympathy with Kissy's misfortune,

Helen could not help smiling at this specimen of primitive philosophy, and as Kentucky went back to the kitchen she followed the two little girls, who had gone to the other side of the yard, where, under a spreading tree, stood a table, on which were large pails of milk. A short, roly-poly looking negro woman stood beside it, dealing out the foaming whiteness to a troop of little urchins, of all possible shades of black and tawny yellow, who came from the distant quarters of the field hands; each carrying a tin cup of half-pint dimensions, which was presented to the presiding genius of the milk pail, and eagerly drained when she had filled it. Milk is healthy food for all young animals, as Mr. Warner knew; and this was one of the established customs by which his live stock was kept in good order.

It was funny to see the little creatures as they came around the table, some of the older ones leading the "wee toddling things," that could hardly walk alone; some boldly marching up to claim their portion, and some shyly hanging back till called; and all casting furtive glances at Mrs. Warner, who stood by to keep order among the otherwise unruly group.

"Still at my old post, you see," she said, as Helen joined her.

"I was just thinking how picturesque the scene is," replied she. "You look so placid and cheerful, — the very goddess of benignity, in a white sun bonnet, — and

Emma and Angie flitting like white doves among the darky group, that turn up their queer little round heads at you, with a sort of worshipful air acknowledging their allegiance. Then there is Aunt Ann, looking like a good-natured gnome, whom you have invoked to do your bidding."

"What mought dat be you called me?" interrupted Aunt Ann, in a tone which showed she half suspected the comparison was not very complimentary to her; and Mrs. Warner added a laughing rejoinder.

"O, yes, it is very picture-like to a young lady of vivid imagination, and I've no doubt you enjoy looking at it; but only think what it is *to do*. I've stood here to see the milk given out to the mothers and fathers of these little ones, when they were no higher than their children are now, and every night since then, when I've been at home, I've had this to attend to. Put that stern reality beside your fancy piece, Miss Helen."

"Look on this picture, and on this," said Helen, taking a theatrical air. "If we must descend to realities, pray why do you do it, since it is a burden?"

"Because it is my business," replied Mrs. Warner. "If I were not here to keep order, the timid and weak would be overpowered by the strong and greedy; and besides the amount of quarrelling which would ensue, half the children would go unfed."

"Why don't you let their mothers feed them?"

"Mercy, child; you don't know any thing about domestic management, or you would never ask that," said Mrs. Warner, a little impatiently.

"I know the result of the present system of management is, that either the mistress is overburdened with cares, and taxed with disagreeable and tiresome duties, or the servants are shamefully neglected," replied Helen. "I should really like to have a change of laws and customs, that would set these people in families, as the Lord created man to be."

"It would be of no use," said Mrs. Warner; "you have lived here long enough to see that they can't take care of themselves."

"What can you spect ob um, when dey ain't *raised* to do it?" interrupted Ann again.

"I don't expect it," replied her mistress, kindly. "I am not complaining. I expect always to be in place of a mother to my people."

"Maybe you find your 'count in it, too. Dey makes better servants when dey don't know nothin'," said Aunt Ann, curtly and half aside, with a quick glance at Helen that almost startled her, from its intensity of meaning.

Mrs. Warner looked at her with surprise, but the reproof she was about to utter was arrested by a child's voice calling and crying at a little distance; and at the same moment, Gus appeared in the gateway, dragging after him a negro baby, who, being hardly able to walk,

had been left behind in the field by the child to whom it had been given in charge. Once within the yard, Gus dropped the arm by which he had upheld the tottering footsteps, and running forward, exclaimed, —

"Dat ar little nig come mighty nigh losin' he supper. Done loss it altogerer, ony I toted him 'long."

"Where you done found him?" asked Aunt Ann.

"Down dar in de corn row," he replied.

"Well, den, take dis ar and gib him," said Ann, pouring a dipper full of milk, and placing it in his hand.

"O, don't let *him* carry it, — he won't get it safely across the yard," said Mrs. Warner.

"Time he begun to be some use. Go 'long wid ye," persisted Ann, doggedly, tapping his head with her spoon, to hasten his movements.

He went off quite carefully and demurely, until he reached the spot where the child sat on the ground, and then, with a motion so quick it was difficult to tell whether it was designed or accidental, he poured the milk all over the dusty wool and the begrimmed face upturned for the expected draught.

The "little nig" caught its breath, and renewed its cries, and Ann sprang forward to avenge the mischief with summary punishment. He stood still until she had nearly touched him, and then suddenly darting under her outstretched hands, took refuge at Mrs. Warner's side, and clung to her dress for security.

"You little mizzable monkey!" Ann said, vehemently, following him to his retreat; but he with well-feigned innocence looked pleadingly to his mistress, exclaiming, "O, now, Ma'am Ann! what de use? Miss' say I couldn't neber tote it safe! You s'pose I could tote it arter dat? S'pose I make miss tell a lie?"

Mrs. Warner released her dress from his grasp, and reproved him for spilling the milk; but he persisted in declaring it an accident, and she was so much amused by his ready wit, that she was not very severe with him.

When this dispute had been settled, and the children sent away, the ladies went into the house. Aunt Ann looked after them, as she slowly gathered up her pans, and shaking her head sagely, she muttered, with a sigh, "Lord help dis poor ole nigger. I b'leeves dere is as much difference in folks as dere is in any body! Ef *I* was ole missis, *I* wouldn't spend all de 'dulgence on one little brat like dat — I'd save some for somebody dat it 'ud do some good to. As for dat ar Gus," she continued, "de Lord knows who his mammy was, but I b'leeves Sam* was his daddy."

On reëntering the parlor, Helen found Hubert and his father its sole occupants; the latter reading a newspaper by the dim twilight, and the former sauntering round the room with an air of ennui.

"How long you have been gone, mother!" he said, as

* Satan.

she entered with Helen. "I hope you found the people in the yard interesting."

"Very much as usual. Why didn't you come out with us, if you were lonesome here without us?"

"I was afraid of intruding. My modesty prevented me from following either you or my inclinations."

His mother had been lighting a candle, and now she held it up within a few inches of his face, saying archly, "Let's see how you look when you are modest. I never knew before that you were troubled with that disease."

"You can't see it now; it is under my whiskers," he rejoined.

"Perhaps it is of the kind which '*blushes unseen*,'" Helen suggested.

"That's it, exactly, Miss Helen, 'and wastes its sweetness on'—persons who don't appreciate it," he replied, with a glance that, spite of herself, called to her cheek the blushes that were lacking on his.

"Come on, Miss Helen," called Mr. Warner, throwing down his paper; "let's have some singing. I've heard nothing fit to be called music since you went away."

"Except the birds," Helen said, smiling, as she seated herself at the piano.

"Pooh! birds don't sing; they only whistle;" and having given utterance to this heresy, he leaned back in his chair, and composed himself for the enjoyment expected in hearing Helen's voice.

CHAPTER FOURTH.

"Feed him with the sigh that rushes
'Twixt sweet lips, whose muteness speaks
With the eloquence that flushes
All a heart's wealth o'er soft cheeks;
Feed him with a world of blushes,
And a glance that shuns, yet seeks."

"Busy as ever," said Helen, as early the next morning she entered the sewing room, where Mrs. Warner was standing by a long table, covered with piles of work, which she was cutting and fitting together. Her delicate hands looked hardly strong enough to wield the immense shears, giants of the genus scissors, with which she shaped garments from the coarse osnaburgs and the heavy wool-lens; but she plied the steel with a dexterity and swift-ness that showed she was familiar with the business.

"Busy as ever," echoed the lady, in a cheerful tone. "Sit down, child, and let me look at you. The children monopolized you so entirely last night, that nobody else had a chance."

"I was going on to the school room, to see if all was ready for the children to commence their studies to-day. It wants but an hour to school time," said Helen, looking at her watch.

"School must begin late this morning," answered Mrs. Warner, "and your presence isn't needed there just now. We have had the room papered and painted, and the workmen were so delayed, that they didn't finish it till last night. The matting was to be put down, and the chairs and tables carried back, last evening; but I left it for Ann to do, and she was cross and lazy, and so it wasn't done, and your school must wait an hour or two."

"And Miss Helen am like

'De man in de moon, come down *too soon*,
T' inquire de way to Noledge,' "

said a little voice near them. They did not need to turn to the open window, on the sill of which he sat cross legged, in order to be sure who it was that uttered this pert rejoinder, for every body in the house knew that "Mother Goose" was, to the boy "'Gus," alias Cæsar Augustus, an unfailing fund of maxims and illustrations, which he dispensed liberally on all occasions.

"You hit it more nearly than you imagine, with your barbarous pronunciation of the good old English town," said Helen, laughing, as she went towards him. "What a little monkey you are, Gus! What have you been doing since I've been gone?"

"Dono, miss. Spect I'se been growin. I does grow most de time," said the child, gravely.

"You must have been mighty little when you began,

if that is the case, for you ain't bigger now than a four-pence set up edgewise."

"O, yes, miss, I'se bigger'n *dat*," replied he, shaking his head with a sententious air. "I'se bigger'n dat *when I began.* I'se de bery idencatle chile dat you read about in de book.

'I was a little fellar, no bigger dan my thumb;
Dey put me in de coffee pot and dere bid me drum.'

My mammy's got de bery coffee pot now — makes her tea in it ebery night — and if I hadn't a been bigger'n four-pence I'd done got loss in de nose ob it;" and he looked up in her face with an earnest air, as if sure she must be convinced by this lucid argument.

"O you monkey, what shall I do with you?" said Mrs. Warner, when their laughter had subsided.

"I ain't a monkey," said Gus, pouting his lips, as if he felt very much slandered.

"What are you, then? You act like one," said Helen.

"*I don't, nudder,*" replied he; "monkeys is lazy, and keep dere mouth shut, and pertends dey don't know nothin, case dey's scare, fear white folks make 'em work. Now, Miss Helen, I ain't dat lazy; *I works.*"

"You work!" exclaimed Mrs. Warner, "I should like to know what you can do?"

"O, I'se done did heaps! I sees ter ebery ting 'bout de house."

"I give you credit for telling the truth there," replied

his mistress. "You do *see* to things surely. I don't think any thing can be done in the house, or out of it, without your knowledge, you little Paul Pry."

"Miss all de time callin Gus names — ebery body is," said the child, rolling up his eyes and sighing with the air of a martyr.

"Well — go away now with your nonsense," said Mrs. Warner, laughing again; and obedient to the word Gus sprang to his feet and dropped out of the window so lightly and quickly that one could hardly tell whether he went up or down, but in an instant he reappeared, climbing a magnolia tree, that stood at a little distance: its brown trunk was densely covered with ivy, whose twisting vines afforded a ladder, up which the agile boy ran swiftly, pausing now and then to imitate the various noises which a mocking bird was amusing himself by making, as he sat perched on the topmost bough.

Mrs. Warner suspended her work to look after the boy, and her face had the expression with which one watches the gambols of a pet animal. It was thus she regarded him. Such pets are often found in southern families, and supply to our republican aristocrats the place left vacant by the court jesters of the ancient *régime*.

"That boy has a wonderful genius for climbing, and develops powers of imitation that are marvellous. I tell Mr. Warner that when he gets too large to be played with — if that time ever comes — we can let him go to

some circus rider, for he certainly will never be fit for any thing else."

So said the lady, carelessly, as she turned back to her cutting, and then added, in a kindly voice, —

"I have a hundred questions to ask you about your visit home, and your brother, and his pretty bride."

"I have one question to ask you first," replied Helen, suddenly recurring to the subject which had puzzled her the previous day. "Do tell me what sort of a man is Colonel Bell?"

"Have you never seen him? O, no, I remember now — he has been absent most of the time for the last two years, and when at home he went very little into society; and you have never been invited there."

"No," replied Helen, with a curling lip, "Mrs. Bell does not condescend so far."

"I wonder what does make the colonel stay away from home so much, lately. Can it be true that they don't live happily together," pursued Mrs. Warner, without seeming to heed this interruption.

"Happily!" ejaculated Helen; "I'd as soon import an iceberg from the north pole to sit by my fireside — nay, sooner; for that would melt under a proper degree of heat, but I don't believe she would."

"It is said she can flash and glow with a very uncomfortable kind of fire," replied Mrs. Warner, laughing.

"O, that is but a fitful, meteoric light, befitting an ice-

berg. It frightens instead of warming and cheering one."

"And sometimes, I reckon, it strikes like the lightning," added Mrs. Warner.

"Yes, on the defenceless I dare say it does. But we are getting quite too grand and fanciful over a bad temper. I want to know about Colonel Bell."

"What about him?"

"Who is he, and who was he? Tell me something of his history."

"He cultivates his patrimonial acres, and rejoices in his wealth. He is of very good family — indeed, I believe his mother was connected with some noble English family. They are descendants of the old Cavaliers, as many of our first families are; I never knew him very intimately. He married his first wife in Alabama, and she left him some immense plantations there, when she died. Poor woman — they said she died of a broken heart."

"Was he unkind to her?"

"It was owing to that one thing which makes so many unhappy families among us. He became bewitched with a handsome quadroon, and there was no more peace in that household."

"Was the woman in his own family?"

"She was at first — she had been there before his marriage — but Mrs. Bell soon scented her out. She wasn't so patient under the affliction as some poor souls

are, and made such a fuss that the whole thing came out."

"How could such a thing be borne!" exclaimed Helen, indignantly.

"Such things have to be borne very often, and in silence too, for the sake of the children, for whom a wife desires, of course, to keep a father's name unsullied. Mrs. Bell had no children. My patience!" added she, snapping her shears energetically, "it makes my blood boil to think of some things I've known; this negro race are the ruin of our husbands and our sons — artful, unprincipled creatures."

"My dear friend, you certainly don't think *they* are wholly to blame," said Helen, whose love of justice rebelled against this sweeping censure.

"It is hard to tell who is most to blame: they are ignorant, and — well — yes, I suppose a good many of them would be virtuous if they could. But society is getting into a shocking state; and when I think of that side of the subject I am almost tempted to be an abolitionist myself. Not but what I think slavery is good enough for the negroes — no doubt they are better off for it — but it is hard that *we* must be sacrificed for their good."

"But Colonel Bell — what did he do?"

"Would you believe it? — he sent the girl away to a small cottage on another plantation, and though I do

really believe he tried to behave himself for a while, he finally deserted his wife altogether, and used to spend his time partly in travelling, and partly with that girl. There were several years he didn't come home at all, except for a few days, when business made it unavoidable. He was quite young, not more than twenty, when he was married, and his wife was older than he, and really not a very interesting woman; but he treated her shamefully."

"What was the end of it?" asked Helen, as she paused.

"Well, Mrs. Bell lived there alone, and bore her sorrows as she could, until at last the girl died, and he came home, almost crazy with grief; for, wicked as it was, he evidently loved her with all his heart and soul."

"And his wife — what did she do then?"

"It was the greatest instance I ever knew of woman's proverbial soft-hearted forgiveness of injuries. They said she thought it was her duty. *Duty*, indeed! — as if it could be duty to forgive such things!"

"The poet says, —

'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned;'

but all women scorned are not furies. Only think what Mrs. Bell must have suffered from desertion, if she loved her husband so well that she could forgive him," said Helen, in tones of pity.

"I don't understand any thing about such love," said Mrs. Warner, tearing a piece of flannel violently. "I'd have gone to the cottage, — they say he fitted it up like a palace in miniature, — and I'd have stabbed her, and choked the children, and then taken my husband off home, and made him behave himself."

Helen smiled, and then suddenly a thought flashed through her brain, which made her whole frame quiver as with a twinge of nervous pain, and she started forward, exclaiming, "Did you say they had children?"

"They had one, but it died before its mother did. My husband says he has seen the place where they are buried. Colonel Bell put a white marble monument over them. There were no bounds to his extravagant passion for that girl."

"And his wife forgave it all! How she must have loved him!" said Helen, musingly, as the color slowly came back to her face, which had been so white for a moment.

"She had become religious, while she was living there alone, and joined the Methodist church; and I suppose it was partly a sense of duty that induced her to forgive; but then she did almost idolize him. Poor woman, she only lived two years after."

"How long after her death was it he married his present wife?"

"O, a good many years. I wondered a little that her mother was so much pleased with the match, even then, for she knew all his past history."

"I imagine Miss Clara and her father arranged that match," said Helen. "I have heard something about the circumstances from Mrs. Avenel."

"Clara and her father quarrelled with young Avenel, I believe, on account of his foolish antislavery notions," said Mrs. Warner.

"They treated him most cruelly," replied Helen. "His father relented at last, but you know he was ill only a few hours, and Mrs. Bell refused to give up the property which had been left her, though her mother says she is sure the will would have been changed, if their father had lived an hour longer. Fortunately, he does not need the wealth she withholds so unjustly. His home is a perfect paradise, and their present happiness repays them for all past trials. He is totally unlike his sister, for his generosity is only bounded by the length of his purse.

"And she is totally selfish," said Mrs. Warner. "Her marriage was thought to be wholly from mercenary motives. Colonel Bell is many years older than she is, and there has never seemed to be much sympathy between them. She was a very brilliant girl, and fond of society, and he is quite the reverse." Then, after a pause, she added, "How happened you to think of asking me about Colonel Bell? Have you met him?"

"He was on the boat with me, coming from Wilmington, and something in his appearance attracted my attention."

"He is very much changed since the days I spoke of. He was very handsome then, and very animated and brilliant; but of late years, he has grown so quiet and grave that I can hardly believe he is the same person."

"I didn't know him, of course, until Mr. Hubert told me his name," said Helen.

"Who honors Mr. Hubert by talking about him?" interrupted a pleasant voice outside the window. "Ah, Miss Helen, it is here you have hidden, behind my portly mamma and her immense work basket; which are certainly some relation to Solomon's three monsters, that continually cry, 'Give, give.'"

"They would fulfil their mission better, if they cried, 'Take, take,' said Mrs. Warner, cheerfully, "for, notwithstanding your sneer at them, mamma and her work baskets are quite necessary to the comfort of a good many about the place."

"Did I sneer?" exclaimed her son; "did I even seem to sneer? No, mamma, I respect you and your baskets, as 'wisest, discreetest, best,' beyond all that orators have said and poets sung, and I only ask that you won't entirely hide away, and bury Miss Helen, when I am looking for her, as now, to go with me. For I have sought her all through the house, to come and see a fine collection of yellow roses, which have opened for the first time this morning, in the garden."

"I cannot go, for I am engaged with the children. It

is time we were at study now," said Helen, gently, but with evident coldness.

He looked at her a moment, with a puzzled air, and then replied, "But they are not here; and I will detain you only a few moments. Can't you come?"

"They will be here in a moment; I hear their voices," said Helen, glad to find she had so good an excuse for avoiding a *tête-à-tête;* and as she spoke, the door opened, and Emma and Angie ran in, followed by Aunt Ann, who simply said, in very gruff tones, "It's done did now for ye," and stamped out of the room, slamming the door after her.

Mrs. Warner's face flushed, and she half turned to the door, as if to recall her servant; but upon a second thought, turned back again, saying carelessly, —

"I think I must have a talk with Aunt Ann; she has been cross long enough for this time, and she is getting a little too impudent."

"It is fortunate she is generally so good-natured," said Hubert, "for when she does get *'riled*, she is the most impudent nigger on the place. I went to the school room where she was, just now, to inquire for Miss Helen, and she told me to go look for her myself, if I wanted her, — *as of course I do*," he added sotto voce, with a meaning glance.

"Why, to tell the truth, I have been cross with her, and we have all been dissatisfied together. Her brother

John, our coachman, thinks he is very much abused because Mr. Warner would not sell him his freedom. He wants to follow his wife and children, who have gone off with our neighbors, the Mellens, who have recently moved to Texas. It was rather hard for him, and we offered to buy the woman and the youngest child, when we found how he felt about it, for we could not think of letting him go, it is so important to have a coachman one can trust, and he is such a faithful fellow. But Mr. Mellen wouldn't sell the wife, and so they were separated."

"Poor fellow," said Helen, "no wonder he felt badly about it. No doubt he was very fond of her."

"Perhaps he was; and I didn't wonder that he looked blue for a while, but he has gone beyond all reason about it, and so has his sister. They have scolded and sulked, till I am out of all patience. He ought to remember how much trouble it would be for us to get a coachman as good as he is; and then, too, one would think he would want to stay with us, for he was raised on this place, and we have always treated him in the kindest manner. I promised him he should have his freedom, if he would only be contented to stay here as long as I lived, and he had the impudence to tell me he didn't reckon it would do him much good if he waited for me to die. I was provoked at that, and told him if I had any more trouble with him, he should have something worth fretting about. How annoying such things are!"

"Some of my friends would say this was one of the evils inseparable from the system," Helen began to say, but Mrs. Warner interrupted her, in a tone half chiding and half good-natured, —

"Don't begin to talk in that way, I beg. You know you are not an abolitionist; so don't pretend to be. We must take things as we find them, and make the best of it. John will be sober till he takes a new wife, and Ann will be cross because her brother is sober; but when it is over, I'll make each of them a handsome present, and that will smooth matters so they'll grow pleasant again. I never shall think so much of John as I have, but I shan't let him know it, and we shall jog on as easily as ever."

"That's it, mother," said Hubert; "you've expressed it exactly; and a good sound philosophy it is we act upon in this region. Don't remove the cause of the disease, but put on a plaster that will heal over the outside of the wound, and, no matter how much the splinter festers and rankles within, send away the doctor and his probes! — we don't need them! Isn't that what you say?"

"I say you are a saucy boy, and had better try and learn manners," replied his mother, menacing him with a savage snap of her shears. She was no philosopher, and now that her momentary vexation had spent itself, his words fell lightly on her ear, and she began cheerfully talking with him about something else, in which Helen joined, after a few moments of thoughtful silence.

These things did not seem to her exactly as they did to her friends; but yet Mrs. Warner was right in saying she was not an abolitionist. She was educated by persons whose feelings had never been enlisted on this vexed question, and she held no definite opinions about it when she entered this family; which was certainly not the best place in the world to see the dark side of slavery.

Every thing seemed so orderly and cheerful, and the proprietors of these human beings seemed to take such real interest in them, and such unwearied care of them, and there was so much to amuse and interest in the development of negro character, that, at first sight, she was completely fascinated. By degrees the illusion had been wearing away. She was too clear-sighted not to perceive there were evils that no kindness could prevent, and sorrows which seemed deeper and darker for the very pains taken to overcome them; but she was yet a dweller in the shadow of that lofty mountain range of *ifs*, which hides the fair land of freedom from so many, who have not the courage or the patience to climb their rugged sides.

After a little while the children grew tired of listening to the conversation of their elders, and drew Helen away to the school room. A sudden recollection arrested her as she stood in the doorway, and she turned back to say,—

"I meant to tell you, when you were speaking of Colonel

Bell, that he evidently knew me before I met him, when we were on the boat. He seemed to know my past history too. How do you account for that?"

"Easily enough," replied Mrs. Warner; "for one day, when I visited there, Mrs. Bell inquired something about you, and I spoke of you and your brother. The colonel was present, and might have heard us, or she might have told him afterwards."

"True," said Helen. "How strange that I did not think of it before!" And she closed the door and went away quite satisfied.

Mrs. Warner went on, gathering into bundles the work she had been cutting; and her son, after a few turns on the piazza, lighted a cigar, and stretched himself on a bench under the window, with his head at an angle that commanded a view of the interior of the room; he remained for some time silent, and looking very much at his ease.

His mother watched him a while, in the pauses of her work, as the servants came and went, receiving orders and giving messages; and at length, when they were again alone, she said abruptly, —

"What are you waiting for? Why don't you speak?"

He started slightly, and after gazing at her a few moments from the corners of his eyes, removed the cigar from his lips and ejaculated, —

"Who?"

Mrs. Warner replied by giving a toss of the head towards the corner of the house used as a school room, and then added, —

"In my time men did not stand shilly-shallying so long."

Her son puffed a while in silence, and then replied, —

"I am not impulsive."

"Impulsive! that you never were; and I begin to think you are not very much in earnest."

"Then you are mistaken," replied he with more warmth; "but to tell the truth I am afraid of her. When I get within a certain distance she holds me off, with a power as invisible as it is invincible."

"She wouldn't be worth asking for, if she did not," returned Mrs. Warner. "What I particularly like in Helen is, her pride and her independence. But you act like a man that don't know his own mind."

"Don't slander me, mother. If I was a little less decided I might do better; but I am not the man to say 'Will you?' more than once, to any woman; and being undecided what she will say, and tolerably sure that a negative would make me feel like patronizing the first railroad accident, or steamboat explosion, or any other speedy and genteel method of shuffling off this mortal coil, I have been waiting —— "

"Like a coward! Fie, for shame!" interrupted his mother, laughing. "You know the old verse, —

'Either his courage is but slight, or his deserts are small;
Who dares not boldly tell his love, he does not love at all.'"

"I know. Seems to me, mamma, this is a new trade you're taking up — this trade of match making!"

"Ungrateful boy! You will find me a match breaker, if you don't take care. I am not going to have my *protègée* played with and teased, to suit your laziness."

"Play! It is real sober earnest to *me*, whatever it may be to you, indifferent spectators, or to Miss Helen, who alternately chills and fires me. But I have my revenge, nevertheless. I enjoy this state of things, strange as it may appear. I am not like 'Billy the Greedy,' in the story books, who ate his cake all at once. I like this suspense that is half hope and half fear. I like to study her character, and peep covertly into the pages of that fresh young heart, which is so slyly, sometimes so unconsciously, opened for my inspection. I am so much older than she, and so much more hackneyed in the ways of the world, you can't think how she charms me with her guileless nature. So impassioned and yet so easily chilled, so full of poetry, and yet not repelled by the plainest common sense. I declare I am getting poetical over it myself," he added, suddenly changing his tone. "We have been having quite a sentimental conversation for two old folks, mamma. Please hand me another cigar from the closet."

"Sentimental, indeed! you have no more heart than a

puff ball, and I'll tell Helen I think so too," said his mother, pulling his whiskers as she put the cigar between his lips.

"O, don't! please," he exclaimed, making up a wry face, and sauntering slowly away as the two seamstresses entered the room and seated themselves to work.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

> " A pathway, like as a thoroughfare,
> Printed all over confusedly,
> As thousands of thousands had gone by,
> The foot of the child in the step of the old;
> The print of the timid, the wary, the bold."

Two or three days passed, during which Helen studiously avoided Mr. Hubert; and when they chanced to meet she was so politely indifferent that, though he exerted himself to an unusual degree, he failed to elicit the least manifestation of interest in himself or his conversation, or to call forth one of those impassioned bursts of feeling which were wont to throw her off her guard, and give his cooler temperament the power to sway her according to his will.

This was not acting — if it had been he would have smiled at it, as a pretty little feminine wile ; for his calm, clear gaze not even love could blind. He heard her quick, elastic tread through the halls and piazzas, her frolics with the children, her merry voice in converse with his mother, and the gushing tones of her melody as she sang to his father ; he saw her gay, cordial, fascinating as ever, apparently untouched by any secret discontent, and

unchanged to all but him. Startled out of his indolence, he began to regard her less as an interesting psychological study, and was conscious of a nervous anxiety and restlessness that every day rendered him more unable to control either himself or her.

He had taken a certain delight — the Sybarite — in gazing at this luscious fruit, and calculating the degree of force he must exert to reach it and make it his own; but now an unseen hand seemed slowly drawing it beyond his grasp. He had taken pride in his power over her; and now he awoke in astonishment to find that power gone.

For it was gone. She thought he had been mocking her — amusing himself with her most sacred feelings and most cherished thoughts; winning her to open her heart to his gaze, careless whether its bloom and its fragrance might not exhale in that exposure, like the strange, delicate flower, which grows snow white in the dense shadow of the forest, but loses its purity and beauty if any hand parts the boughs above to let in the sunlight. Her pride and dignity revolted against such treatment, and the reaction of feeling filled her with a singular calmness, so that his voice, his glance, his touch could no longer thrill her nerves or excite any mental emotion.

On the afternoon of the third day Mrs. Avenel, who lived four miles away, drove over to see Helen and hear from her of the welfare of her children at the north.

When she went away, she invited Helen to go home with her, and spend the next day; and, as the evening was fine, she consented. As she was going to get her bonnet, Hubert remarked to Mrs. Avenel, —

"You need not send Miss Helen home to-morrow, for I will do myself the honor to come and escort her."

Helen overheard him, through the half-open door, and beckoning little Emma from her play on the piazza, sent her to ask her grandmother for permission to go with her. Mrs. Avenel eagerly seconded the request, and Helen reappearing, shawled and bonneted, added her voice, and the permission was given. Mrs. Warner was highly amused by this manœuvre, which she understood quite well; but her son was not a little vexed, and as he helped the ladies into the carriage, he said, in no very amiable tone, "I hope you will find Emma less trouble than she usually is. These children are indulged entirely too much."

Mrs. Avenel smiled, and said something about "bachelors' children," and with Helen's light laugh ringing in his ear, he watched the carriage drive away.

Helen's visit to the Pines (for so Mrs. Avenel's place was named) passed very pleasantly and quickly; and in the afternoon, just as they were expecting Hubert to take them home, a carriage came driving in great style around the curving avenue, and drew up before the front door.

"It is uncle Hubert," little Emma exclaimed, when

she first heard the sound of wheels; but she drew back with a child's shyness, when she saw the splendid equipage, and Mrs. Avenel said, with a flurried look, "It is the Colonel and Mrs. Bell."

The gentle little widow went forward with some trepidation to meet her magnificent daughter. She was sensitive and easily disturbed by any *contretemps*, and she knew Clara did not like Helen, and was not quite sure how the colonel would meet her. But the colonel, ordinarily so reserved and silent, was, on this occasion, affable and even talkative. Perhaps he noticed the haughty nod, which was all the salutation his wife vouchsafed Helen, and which, to tell the truth, was met by an inclination that might have befitted an empress; for Miss Helen had both pride and temper of her own; perhaps he saw Mrs. Avenel's anxious glance, and wished to relieve it. However this may be, he was so friendly to his mother-in-law, so polite to her visitor, and so caressing to the child, that his wife stared at him with unfeigned astonishment, and the others were entertained and delighted. He did not at first allude to their meeting on the boat, and therefore Helen was silent about it; but in the course of conversation, he spoke of it to Mrs. Avenel, and added, "Have you ever thought that Miss Helen very much resembles some of my family?"

Mrs. Avenel looked, and shook her head negatively.

"I believe you were not acquainted with my elder

sister," he continued, "for she was married before you were much acquainted with our family. Your friend reminds me of her so much that when I first saw her I was quite startled."

"She died some time ago, I believe," said Mrs. Avenel.

"She did. She was lost at sea with her two children; and if we had not received good evidence of their death from those who survived the wreck, I should be almost tempted to believe that this might be her child."

"I am an orphan, and a voyage at sea is among my earliest recollections," said Helen, tremulously; but Colonel Bell did not seem inclined to pursue the subject, and although Mrs. Avenel remarked upon the coincidence, a few moments' reflection convinced Helen that she could not be his sister's child.

As they rose to take leave, a light covered buggy drove to the door, and little Emma ran out to meet her uncle, and assure him that she had been no trouble at all. A few compliments passed between the new comer and the departing guests, and then the colonel and his wife entered their carriage, the liveried footman closed the door, and mounted to his place, and the swift horses dashed the white sand from beneath their feet, as they sped away.

"They do say," said Mrs. Bell, leaning forward to look at the group on the piazza, — "they do say that Hubert Warner is in love with that pert governess. Do you suppose he can mean to marry her?"

"O," exclaimed the colonel, "I hope it is so."

"But do you suppose he will *marry* her?" repeated the wife.

"Why not, pray? She is a splendid girl. By Jove, I hope he will." And he looked quite excited and earnest.

"For mercy sake, what is it to you? What do you care about her? What has come over you to-day, colonel? I never saw you come so near being agreeable. You really talked almost as well as common folks."

But the colonel did not reply; and without seeming to hear his lady's sneering words, leaned back on the velvet cushions, with a half smile on his lips, apparently absorbed in pleasant revery. She looked at him a few moments with an expression of curiosity, which gradually gave place to one of vexation; then with a yawn of weariness she turned away, and neither of them spoke again during their drive home.

Meantime Helen and little Emma were also on their way home. Mr. Hubert held the reins, and though his horse certainly could not have required all his attention, he did not seem disposed to talk. Helen, on the contrary, was full of gayety, and chatted incessantly, sometimes to him, and oftener to the child, whom she seemed bent upon amusing with stories and riddles. When they had accomplished more than half the distance, Hubert turned aside from the main road into one of the winding woodland paths.

"Where are you going?" said Helen. "Do you know this road?"

"Perfectly well; it will lead us homeward through the pines; and now the sun is low, it throws lengthened glances between the trees, lighting their dusky recesses with a strange beauty, which I know will please you."

"That will be fine," said Helen. "I love the woods at sunset."

"The air is very soft and still to-night. But pray keep that chatterbox quiet, and condescend to give me a little notice. Do you know you have hardly spoken to me since we started?"

"Do hear that, Emma," said Helen, laughing. "You are not to talk any more, but must pay constant attention to every word your uncle says."

But Hubert did not laugh; and when she turned towards him, she met such a strange look, so grieved, so indignant, that the smile faded from her lips. The words had evidently vexed or wounded him.

"I did not ask *the child's* attention," he said, at length; "why do you continually put something or somebody between you and me? Are we never to have any more of those *tête-à-têtes* which I, at least, used to enjoy so much?"

"You address me in a very indignant tone," said Helen, lightly; "pray what have I done, that I am to be scolded

so? How can you have a heart to be so disagreeable, this delightful evening?"

"Am I cross? I beg your pardon. Suppose we 'make up,' as the children say, and 'be good to each other;' and as he spoke, he turned towards her, and held out his hand. She gave hers with instant frankness, but his clasp was close and lingering, and she was astonished to feel his hand tremulous and icy cold, and to see that his face was pale, and his lips quivered. He was not mocking her now. She felt it, and her heart thrilled with a tumult of secret joy and fear. Her eyes sank beneath his gaze, and she drew away her hand. He yielded it reluctantly, and for a long time neither spoke, until at last Emma remarked innocently, that she did not see why she and Miss Helen could not talk, if he did not want to; then he said, "Did you know that next Friday is the time for me to leave home, if I am to take the next boat for Cuba?"

"I remember it now, but I had forgotten it was so soon," Helen replied, overcoming her embarrassment.

"What if I should tell you I had some thoughts of postponing my departure a fortnight longer?"

"I should be glad, if your business does not require your presence; for your mother will be quite lonely when you are gone, and I don't know whom your father will have to supply your place as a political opponent, when

he gets excited over the newspapers. You are invaluable in that department."

"Suppose I should tell you it is not because of my business, — for that requires me immediately, — or for any extraordinary filial devotion, — though that might be praiseworthy, — but for a very different reason I am tempted to remain at home. Suppose it were for the sake of somebody who has caused me more disquiet than any earthly thing, and I was conscious the while that my only chance of safety was in going away, and that a few more days would fix my disquiet incurably. What should you say, then?"

"What are you talking about, uncle Hubert?" exclaimed little Emma. "I am paying all the attention I can, and you use such long words I don't know what you mean."

"Bless your heart, I don't mean you shall," said Hubert; and it was a great relief to Helen to laugh with him at the child's naive remark.

"You have not given me your opinion," he urged, a moment after.

"If I must give it," replied she, mischievously, "I will borrow from Flibertigibbet's philosophy, and tell you you are like the sapient gentleman whose exploits he takes such delight in recounting; for if you willingly run into such awful danger, how are you better than he?" And she sung gayly, —

"'There was a man in our town,
And he was wondrous wise,
He jumped into a bramble bush,
And scratched out both his eyes,'"

prolonging the strain by extempore trills, and fugues, and repetitions, which would have made Mother Goose open her eyes in surprise, as the clear, bird-like tones were warbled through the woods.

Hubert listened, delighted; but when she had ceased, he said eagerly, "You have it exactly; I am like that gentleman of renown, for you will please remember how he was cured.

'He jumped into another bush,
And scratched them in again.'"

"I understand about *that*, and I can't sing it, but I can say it," exclaimed Emma, joyfully.

"What a woman Mother Goose was! I think she must have been a female physician, to have instituted such an active treatment. What oculist of the present day would dare advise such a mode of cure? What *opathy* do you suppose she professed?" said Helen, laughing.

"I don't know, and care less," replied Hubert, smiling. "I am only interested in the fact that the man was cured by the same plant which caused his cruel blindness, for my only hope lies in using the same remedy. '*Similia similibus curantur.*' For the present, I am a homœopathist, with the man of Islington."

"O, smell the jasmine!" exclaimed little Emma, clapping her hands as a faint puff of wind, sweeping through the trees, suddenly filled the air with rich odors.

"How sweet it is! and, speaking of bushes, see there is a sparkle-berry bush, all covered with jasmine;" and Helen pointed to a knoll a short distance away.

"Will you take the reins, while I go and get some for you?" asked Hubert.

"Drive on a few rods, till we come to yonder tree, where you can tie your horse," Helen replied, "and I will run down into the hollow, by the spring, and get some of those laurel blossoms. They are unusually fine."

"Won't it be wet there? I can get both for you."

"O, no, let me get them — please."

He did as she desired; and with Emma following, Helen ran down to the spring. It was in a deep dell, with narrow, steep banks, thickly covered with bushes, and shadowed by a grove of young trees, whose bright-green foliage, tinged with a golden glory by the setting sun, contrasted vividly with the sombre stateliness of the pines around. But the trees, leaning towards each other and interlocking their branches, made such deep shadow in the dell below, that the little stream was hardly visible as it flowed silently along its worn channel. As they descended towards it, there was such a perceptible change in the air that Helen feared the child would take cold, and

bade her remain on the bank above while she went for the flowers.

Running down the path, slippery with sand and fallen leaves, she came to the spring, where some provident hand had placed a barrel, which now overflowed with the bubbling water; and a board across the brook, a rude bench, and a circle of stones, bearing the marks of fire, showed that some "mauma" or "aunt" had been using this beautiful little temple of nature for a wash kitchen.

Using a large oak leaf for a cup, Helen tasted the cool, sweet water, and then ran lightly up the opposite bank, where a thick cluster of laurel bushes, covered with their delicate pink blossoms, seemed to cast a faint light amid the shade. She had picked two or three bunches when she thought she saw a slight movement among the leaves, and on parting the branches to see what bird or squirrel was hiding there, she encountered two keen, bright eyes, glowing like fire, and a suppressed breathing, as if some wild animal was about to spring at her. Sudden terror deprived her of the power to move or speak; but as she stood helpless and trembling, fascinated by that strange glare, a human voice faintly pronounced her name, and a hard, black hand stretched imploringly towards her.

Somewhat reassured to find the object of her fears as much frightened as herself, she leaned forward, and now she saw a negro crouching among the thick branches, that

would have effectually concealed him if his involuntary motion had not arrested her attention.

"Who is it? — what are you doing here?" she asked, somewhat authoritatively.

"O, Miss Helen, don't you know me?" said the voice. "I'se Kissy's husband — I'se Michel."

"What are you doing here? We heard you were sold!" she said, quickly.

"O miss, don't tell — for de good Lord sake don't — don't call any body. I only wants to see my wife, and then I'se gwine right back."

"You know you're not telling the truth," said Helen. "You have run away from your master, or you would not be hiding here."

"O miss, don't tell — don't! O, I beg's you for mercy! on'y tink all we poor niggers has to bar — yer don't look like you'd be so hard on a poor feller."

The agony of his voice and gesture no words can portray; and Helen hastened to relieve the fear which her momentary asperity had awakened.

"Poor fellow," she said, kindly, "you need not be afraid of me. But you are not safe here."

"I know it, miss. I'se ony hidin here to-day, case 'pears like I must see Kissy once more. When dark comes, I'se gwine up dare, and ef you'd ony tell her to meet me down by de blast' pine, de Lord knows how I'd bless yer."

"I'll certainly tell her. But, Michel, you run a great risk. Any one else might have found you as easily as I did."

"I knows it, miss; but if any body catches dis chile arter dis, dey catches a *dead* nigger;" and he drew from his sleeve a rude weapon, formed apparently of the point of a carving knife, inserted into a wooden handle, and drew it across his throat, with a meaning gesture.

At this moment they heard Mr. Hubert calling Helen nearer, and Michel exclaimed in terror, —

"Go — O, do go! Don't let him come here, miss, for I does want to see Kissy once more 'fore I die."

Giving him one more assurance that she would send his wife to meet him, Helen hastened down the bank, and found Hubert at the spring.

"How few flowers you have," he said, astonished to see only the two clusters she had first picked, and unconsciously retained.

"Flowers! O, yes, I took only the perfect ones."

"Could you find no more? I think I see some fine ones up there; shall I go get them for you?"

"O, no, I was up there — I have enough," said Helen, hurriedly. "Let us pick some nearer home."

"As you please," he answered, wondering at her excited and abstracted air; and then he added, with a manner as excited as her own, "Let me speak to you one word — only one word, Helen!"

But, as if she had not heard him, she said hastily, "It is chilly here, and damp; let us return to the carriage." And he saw that she shivered all over and became very pale. As she sprang up the path she slipped and nearly fell. He raised her, and as he assisted her to gain the level road, he said, fervently, —

"I have a strong arm, Helen; you may lean on it now and evermore. It will support you over all the rough places of life, if you will only allow it. O, will you?"

But Helen, frightened at her own strange joy, and overcome by so much varying excitement, disengaged herself from his arm, and leaning against the trunk of a tree, burst into tears.

"What have I done!" he exclaimed — "what have I said to distress you?"

"Don't talk to me now — I am excited — I can't understand you," she said, hurriedly, and almost running away from him, sprang into the carriage. But once there, with Emma safely in her arms, a change came over her spirits, and she laughed, talked with the child incessantly, and every now and then burst out with some snatch of a song, that awoke the echoes of the silent woods. Never since her return had Hubert seen her so brilliant and so full of mirth, and he hardly knew whether it boded him good or ill.

When they reached home, they found the parlor full of company, and tea waiting them; and it was not till that

was over that Helen found time to glide away unnoticed to the nursery, where Kissy, who was Angie's maid, was undressing her.

The child looked up as she entered, and said, earnestly, "Please, Miss Helen, tell Kissy not to cry. I heard her crying in the night last night, and she's been crying all day. There, she's crying again! Please, Kissy, don't; Angie loves you!" And she wiped the dark face, and laid her own cheek tenderly against it.

Poor Kissy tried to say something, but broke down in the attempt, and gave way to a fresh fit of weeping. Helen took the child from her lap, and having quietly finished undressing, laid her in bed, and bestowed the good-night kiss, she beckoned the maid to follow her, and went to her own room.

When the door was shut she said, kindly, "I know what your trouble is, and am sorry for you; but you must try to bear it; perhaps it won't be so bad as you fear."

"O miss, does ye know 'bout it? 'Twan't true what dey say dat time 'bout Michel. He ain't neber took no new wife, but he's sold. O, my poor feller! he massa done sold him. O, dear! O, dear!" and she wrung her hands and groaned.

"Do you know why he was sold?"

"O Miss Helen, I reckons 'twasn't he massa 'zacly, sold him, but he missis, Miss Clara; she hard one, and dey all hab streakin time dere. 'Pears like she got mad

case my Michel done comes home 'fore he time out; dey hires him out dis year past; and she say it all Michel fault, so as to be near me, and she *sell* him. Dey tuck him clear off widout neber let him come say good by to poor Kissy. O Miss Helen, you don't know nothin what a pain I has *here* — eber since I find it out." And she laid her hand on her heart.

"Kissy," said Helen, impressively, "listen to me. Can you keep a secret? Can you be silent and never tell any one what I am going to tell you?"

"O, yes, you may trust Kissy," said she, growing calmer.

"Listen then — I have seen your husband to-day."

The girl uttered a faint exclamation, and leaned forward, with her whole soul looking out from her eager, anxious face. Helen went on.

"I have seen him; he was hiding in the woods near here, where we stopped to gather flowers. He has run away from his master. I had no time to ask him questions, but he told me to tell you to meet him by the blasted pine tree after dark."

"I'll go," said the girl, almost breathless from excitement. "He was sold to go to Georgy; and now I reckon he's run away. O, I must go quick, or some of dese yer niggers will see him, and may be dey'll tell. O Miss Helen, bless ye. 'Pears like my heart's *dat* light now, wid de thought o' seein him again."

She seized Helen's hand and kissed it fervently, as she spoke, and then hurried away. After she had left the room it occurred to Helen that perhaps she might share her husband's flight towards the north star; and for a moment she was alarmed. "But," she added, half aloud, "I don't blame her if she does go; and if Mrs. Warner suspects me of instigating her to escape, I shall tell her what I have done, and see if she will *dare* say I have not obeyed the requirements of humanity and justice." And with this heroic sentence on her lips, she went down stairs, where she was soon engaged in an animated discussion of the weather, and various other equally novel and important matters.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

"The morn is up again—the dewy morn,
With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom;
Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,
And smiling as if earth contained no tomb,
And glowing into day."

It must be confessed that Helen felt not a little relieved the next morning, when she saw Kissy engaged in her usual household duties. She looked anxious, and somewhat sad, but her "how d'ye" to Helen was accompanied by a grateful smile, that told she had seen her husband, and there was no opportunity to ask more.

After breakfast, Helen called the children, and shunning the parlor, where she suspected Hubert was waiting to see her, she went out by a side door through the garden, into the grove of pines, which skirted that part of the estate, and extending back for a quarter of a mile, mingled here and there with oak openings, and the hard wood growth which springs up along the watercourses, formed a dividing line between "the great house" and the plantation that stretched away many an acre from its farther verge. Here the children loved to walk with their teacher, who often brought their books thither, and who

knew a thousand ways of combining instruction and amusement.

But this morning the books had been left behind, and Miss Helen seemed too much preoccupied even to talk to them; and so, when they had walked a while, she sat down on a fallen log, and they left her to her revery.

Busy with their play, what cared they for the flight of time? And busy with a multitude of untold hopes and fears, and secret, trembling joy, and bashful, half-acknowledged love, how should she know she had sat there for more than an hour, in nearly the same attitude? — her white sun-bonnet thrown back, exposing the glossy raven hair, from which the sunshine seemed to slide off, to touch with new brightness the large eyes gazing dreamily downwards, the rich bloom of her cheek, the coral-tinted lips, half parted with a smile, and the small, white hands, that lay folded in her lap.

More than an hour she had been there, when suddenly a hand was laid firmly, almost heavily, on her shoulder. She started, and looking up, saw Mr. Hubert gazing down upon her.

"Ay, you had better blush," he said, abruptly, as he noticed the glow of her cheek. "You knew I was waiting for you, and so you stole off here through the garden. O Miss Helen, as Gus says about himself, you are certainly 'up to capers,' demure as you look at times. Do you know I half believe you are coquetting with me? If

I should tell the truth now, what do you suppose I should call you?"

"*If* you should tell the truth! O, pertinent *if*, for a man of your habits," said Helen, trying to speak carelessly.

"O, *im*pertinent miss! But if I should?"

"Perhaps you'd call me a bramble bush," said Helen, and then grew more than ever confused, as she saw how eagerly he seized upon the thoughtless allusion.

"You remember that! you understood me, then!" he exclaimed, seating himself beside her. "O Helen, you know, then, that you have torn my heart out of my body."

"Nay," said she, striving to rally, "it was the eyes, and not the heart, which we talked about."

"It is the heart I must talk of now, at any rate, for this suspense I cannot bear," he replied, passionately. "I lay my heart beneath your feet. You may trample on it, and spurn it if you will, but its latest throb will be for you. Will you take it?"

"Nay," said Helen, tremulously, "if that gift is mine, do you think I will not prize it?"

He took her hand courteously, almost reverently, and pressed it to his lips. "Helen," he said, simply and earnestly, "I love and honor you above all mortal beings. Will you be my wife?"

"But your mother! — your family!" she murmured almost inaudibly.

"Proud Helen! they love you, too, and they know of my love for you. The question rests only with yourself. Will you be mine?"

She looked up with a shy smile, and laid her other hand on that he still retained. He grasped it eagerly. There was no need of words.

At length the children were seen running towards them, Emma leading little Angie, who was half crying.

"What is the matter?" Helen asked, as they came near.

"Angie is frightened," said Emma. "We heard a noise down there in the hollow, and it keeps growing louder, and she thinks it is a bear coming to catch her."

Hubert was about to laugh at the children, and send them away again, when a faint sound reached his ears, and he stood up and listened intently for a moment. Helen saw a shade of anxiety on his face, as he turned to her, saying, "It is the baying of hounds, and I think we had better go home, as they may come this way. There would be no danger if they were well trained, for in that case they would not touch any thing but the prey they scent; but there is a man in the neighborhood who keeps some savage dogs, which are so badly trained that they are quite dangerous. I heard of a white man being badly torn by them a few weeks ago, as they came up with him in the woods."

They were walking on while he was speaking, and now,

as the noise came nearer, they hastened their steps, Hubert carrying Angie in his arms, and Helen leading her sister. For a little while they hurried on without speaking; and then, looking back, Helen exclaimed, "I see them; they are coming after us; do you suppose they see us?"

Hubert looked in the direction she indicated, and there, the ground being level for a long distance, he could discern through the trees three dogs bounding furiously towards them.

"Hurry!" he exclaimed; "they do seem to be on our track, but I think we may outrun them."

They hastened on breathlessly, and were within a few rods of the garden gate, when he cast one more glance over his shoulder. The dogs were close upon them, their great red mouths foaming, and their white fangs glistening savagely, while the air rang with their hoarse baying, as if a thousand open throats were menacing destruction to the fugitives.

"Run, Helen, — save yourself, — I will defend the children," Hubert exclaimed, in the sharp, quick tones of extreme anxiety.

"We are almost there; we will share the danger together," she answered, almost calmly; and as she spoke, she caught Emma in her arms, and went on, panting, flying, though thus burdened, till the gate was reached, was closed and fastened, and they were safe. But so narrow

was their escape, that one of the dogs snapped at Hubert, and tore a large piece from his coat, as it shut in the gate. The gate was high and close, and smooth on the outside, so that the furious animals could not spring or climb over it, and howling madly, they ran along the hedge, nosing the ground, and trying to break through; but fortunately the array of thorns was firm and sharp, and, foiled in every attempt, they came back to the gate, which they bit, and scratched, and leaped against with frightful force.

Hubert had hastened to the house for his pistols; but Helen, who had been so strong and calm through all the danger, became weak as an infant when she found herself safe, and sank down on one of the garden seats, faint with fatigue and alarm. Mrs. Warner, when she found the children were not hurt, hastened to her, and soon Hubert appeared, with his pistols loaded, and walked rapidly to the gate. Mounting on the inside beam, he looked over at the furious creatures, who, when they saw him, made renewed efforts to reach him, and was just taking aim to shoot them, when a loud voice called him to stop, and a man appeared, coming swiftly along.

"Call off your dogs, or I'll kill them," Hubert shouted.

The man endeavored to obey him, but they were unmanageable; and seeing that one of them had nearly broken a hole through the hedge, he fired, and the dog fell to the ground, in the agonies of death.

"What do you mean, shooting my best dog!" exclaimed the man, angrily, drawing a pistol in his turn.

"Put up that! Two can play at that game," said Hubert, angrily, pointing his remaining weapon at the stranger.

The man lowered his arm, but repeated, "He was my best dog — what did you shoot him for?"

"You miserable Yankee scoundrel, what did your dogs chase us for?" exclaimed Hubert, thoroughly enraged.

"I am not a Yankee; I am the son of a Kentucky gentleman," retorted the man, drawing himself up as if he had received a great insult.

"Your father must be proud of you!" said Hubert, surveying him from head to foot, with great scorn. "Call off these howling devils, and muzzle them, or I will kill them both," he added, peremptorily. The man, fearing the threat would be fulfilled, complied with the command, and, after a good deal of trouble, succeeded in muzzling and tying the dogs to a tree which stood not far off.

He was a tall, wiry-looking man, about forty years old, with light hair, and dull, gray eyes; and his face, hands, and dress gave unmistakable evidence that cleanliness, at least, was not among his virtues.

Having secured the two dogs, he came again to the gate where Hubert still remained, and, doubling his fist, declared, with an oath, he would have satisfaction for the death of the animal which lay on the sand.

"You Yankee scoundrel, leave this place," said Hubert, sternly; "you may be thankful I didn't put a bullet through your head, as well as the dog's."

"I am not one of those miserable pie-crust Yankees," exclaimed the man, "and I won't be called so."

"What do you look so much like one for, then? Men of your stamp generally are Yankees."

"I can't help my looks, but I won't be called names by any body, big or little," replied he, in churlish tones.

"You are in Yankee business, any way," returned Hubert, carelessly. "Hunting niggers is a dirty piece of work no gentleman would soil his hands with; and that, I suppose, is your business here; but why don't you teach your dogs to know a white man from a nigger?"

"I'm a southern gentleman myself, and I despise the Yankees as much as any body," replied the man, drawing a little nearer, and speaking less angrily; "but I'll say this much for them, if nobody kept niggers, nobody 'd have to hunt 'em. What do you say to that?"

"I say that people who can't treat niggers so they won't want to run away, have no business to hold them; and those that hunt them and carry them back, always give them back to hard masters, and no decent man would dirty his fingers with such business. But I don't stay here to bandy words with *you*. I just give you warning that your dogs are a nuisance, — our ladies can't walk in

the woods for fear of them, — and if you don't take them out of the district before twenty-four hours are over, they shall be shot as dead as that carcass yonder."

"Bless you, they ain't the least mite dangerous, only to niggers," said the man, earnestly.

"Impudence! do you tell me that! when here is a lady and children who might have been torn to pieces by them?"

"They wouldn't got hurt, nor you either, if you'd only stepped one side, out of their way. It wasn't *you* they was after. They was on full scent after a nigger they're hunting; I thought most likely I'd find him up here to your place, for his wife belongs here."

"Whom do you mean?"

"It's a fellow named Michel. He used to belong to Colonel Bell; but he was sold about a month ago, and when they was taking him to Georgy, the black villain slipped his leash, and got off. So the fellow that bought him sent to me. I hunted round with the dogs till they got on the track, and since then they have come right on a bee line, all this morning and last night. I'm clean knocked up, I'm so tired, and I left my horse down here a piece; but I tell you 'twas pretty to see the critters go;" and the man looked back to his hounds, his eye kindling with professional pride.

Hubert bit his lips, and looking down at his mother,

who had stood near him in the garden, and out of sight of the man, he said, —

"Did you know about this? It is Kissy's husband, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied she; "I heard of it some time ago, and I believe Kissy knows it now, for she has cried most of the time for the last two days. He can't be here, though!"

"I am not so sure that he has not been here," said Hubert, thoughtfully. "Those dogs certainly acted as if they scented their prey."

"Come! what are you talking about?" the man called out, impatiently. "Open the gates, and stand out o' the way, and just see how splendidly the dogs will nose him out. I won't unmuzzle 'em, so they can't hurt any body; and I know if he ain't here now, he's been here, and the critters act as if they smelt him pretty near. See how they jump and spring."

Hubert gave a long, low whistle. "They'll jump a while longer before they come into these grounds. What, man! do you suppose any gentleman would have you hunting through his estate with your infernal dogs?"

"I know some gentlemen that do it," said the stranger, tauntingly, "and I reckon I'll find out some way to do it, if that nigger is here, if I have to stay round the place a week."

"You remember what I told you about getting the dogs out of the district! I'll shoot them if you stay."

The noise of the dogs, and the firing of pistols, had aroused the whole household, and by degrees they had collected within the garden, nearer and nearer to the spot where this loud conversation was going on; and now Mr. Warner, arriving at the house in the opposite direction, saw them through the open doors, and came to find out what was happening.

A few words passed between father and son, and then Hubert stepped down, and his father, opening the gate, passed out, and began questioning the man. Hubert went to Helen, who stood a little apart from the rest, and was startled to see her looking so very pale and anxious.

"Don't be alarmed; your fright was too much for you; come into the house, and rest yourself," he said, tenderly, drawing her hand within his arm, and leading her away.

But she clasped both hands over his arm, and looking up in his face with tearful eye, said imploringly, "It is Kissy's husband; she saw him last night, and I fear he may be here now. Will your father let the man in here to search for him? Cannot we save him?"

"Father may consent to have the out-buildings searched; indeed, he cannot very well help it. Do you know where he is?"

"No; but look at Kissy; she must know he is in danger."

Hubert looked towards the piazza, where the wretched wife stood alone, leaning against a pillar. They could not see the expression of her face, but her attitude betokened the most intense anxiety. Hubert looked down thoughtfully a few moments, and then his whole face lighted; and placing Helen on the garden seat, he said, cheerfully, "I will save him," and walked rapidly to the house.

From her position Kissy had seen his conversation with Helen, and her gestures, and meeting his kindly glance as he came up the steps, she sprang forward, and crouching at his feet, she cried, "O Mass Hubert, he *is* here. O, for de love of Heaven *do* save him."

"Where is he? Get up, girl; somebody will see you. Where is he?"

"In de barn — I done hid him. O, don't let him be found," she said, wringing her hands as she rose to her feet.

"Go, get him — quick — you have not a moment to lose — and bring him to my room."

She sped away, and in a few moments reappeared with Michel, who was able to cross the yard without being seen, as all the servants were in the garden.

"Massa's too good!" said the poor fellow, gratefully, as he saw Hubert waiting in the upper hall to receive him.

"We'll talk by and by," said Hubert; "come here, now; and you, girl, go down stairs, and look calm as you

can; and keep your mouth shut, for I don't want old massa to know of this till I tell him myself."

He drew Michel into the chamber. His bed stood in a recess, and he ordered the negro to creep under and behind it, and for his life not to move or speak till he gave him leave; and when he had seen his orders obeyed he returned to the piazza, just in time to see his father and the stranger go through the yard, to the servants' apartments. Helen joined him there. She did not ask what he had done with Michel, but one look at his face assured her of safety, and her softly spoken thanks and her glad smile would have repaid him for a much greater effort. Presently Mr. Warner came back, looking weary and annoyed, and he muttered, as he threw himself into a chair, —

"That is the greatest brute I ever saw."

"You won't let him come into the house?" said Hubert, inquiringly.

"I suppose I must."

"I don't see the necessity."

"He threatens me with a search warrant if I don't, and I don't want to quarrel with such a low fellow as that. Let him look, and woe betide him if he comes again on such an errand."

Hubert, who had been walking along the piazza, with Helen at his side, took two or three more turns in silence, and then said, —

"If he must be admitted, let me go with him. I will take care he does no harm."

"As you please — he isn't a very agreeable companion, I assure you."

"I suppose not. Here he comes — the rascal: I wonder if I shall be able to refrain from kicking him down stairs after I have gone up with him."

The man now approached, snapping his riding whip, and with a malicious air he pointed it at Kissy, who stood near, and said, —

"Is that the nigger's gal?"

Mr. Warner nodded assent.

He strode forward and attempted to take her by the shoulder; but she shrank, trembling, from his touch, and took refuge behind her master's chair.

"Look here, you wench — where's Michel?" he said, shaking his fist at her; and then looking at Mr. Warner, he added, —

"I've looked in every hole about the premises, and I can't find him any where; but if you'll only let me tie that gal up and give her some, I'll soon get out of her where he is."

"Sir," said Mr. Warner, stiffly, "I don't like such talk. You have looked till you are satisfied, and now the sooner you go away the better I shall like it."

"I don't know about being satisfied," replied he, with a cool impudence.

"Come, then; the sooner we are done with you the better," said Hubert, impatiently; and he stepped forward to lead the way. The man turned to follow him, and then, for the first time, his eyes fell on Helen, who had been half hidden behind a high stand of plants, in the shadow of the vines that grew over the piazza. He looked at her at first carelessly, and then, with a sudden start, he stopped and gazed earnestly, his dull eyes gradually opening wider and wider, his lips half parted, and his whole face settled into an expression of the most intense astonishment.

"Ten thousand devils!" he exclaimed, at length, the words dropping slowly from his tongue, as if it had been paralyzed; and then, with a long whistling breath he added, "If this yer ain't the most extrodinary likeness I ever *did* see — or else it is herself come back again. Wh… on airth mought that yo… ng woman be?"

His … one was so familiar and i… nsolent, that coming after o many p… ovocations, it quite over… turned what little patience was left in the two gentlemen who heard him. Mr. Varner started u… , saying, —

"What do you m… ean by insulting a you… ng lady in my ouse?"

Hubert did not speak a word, but with one … owerful ick sent him down the pi… a steps; so suddenl… y and rcibly, that he fell forward on his face, and lay spra… wl… g on the ground.

It is said there are some men to whom being knocked down is a salutary discipline. However it might have been in this case, the man's whole manner was changed when he arose. For a moment he stood irresolute, and then ascending the steps, he motioned to Hubert to guide him through the house; but he did not look in his face except in sly, sidewise glances, and he did not speak. Once he looked towards the place where he had seen Helen, but she had gone, and he followed Hubert into the house. When they reached the upper hall this latter gentleman turned to him and said, sternly,—

"Hark, fellow; I'll go before you and open the doors of all the rooms, and you may stand and look in; since you seem to think we hide niggers in them, I suppose this form must be gone through with — but if you presume to desecrate one of these rooms by stepping your feet inside the doors, I'll shoot you as I would a dog."

The strange, dark shadow on the man's face lowered still more gloomily, but he did not seem to resent being thus addressed, and made no reply. He followed the directions implicitly, never attempting to enter the rooms, as one door after another was flung open, and closets and wardrobes revealed their contents beneath Hubert's impatient hand. Poor Michel trembled in his hiding-place, but was unseen and unsuspected. When all the rooms had been seen except Helen's and Mrs. Warner's, the man went down stairs without a word, and so out to the piazza and

through the garden, and closing the gate softly behind him, went away.

Only when he saw the dead hound, that still lay on the sand where he fell, he paused a moment, and a spasm of emotion disturbed the stony calmness of his features.

He lifted up his arms and shook both fists towards the gate behind him, and with a muttered imprecation untied his dogs, and leading them, disappeared among the trees.

That evening, as Helen sat in her own room, the door opened softly; she heard a quick step behind her, and two firm though gentle hands pressed her face, drawing back her head so that a cordial kiss could be placed upon her lips; and Mrs. Warner said, in her own hearty tones, without the least prelude, —

"I am glad of it, my child; you are a little too good for that lazy boy, but still I believe he'll try to make you a good husband."

In her heart Helen thought, "Ah, proud mother, you would not think the Queen of England too good for your son;" but she only said, "You make me too happy;" and kissed the hands she had taken.

After this little "ice breaking," Mrs. Warner went on with her usual business-like promptness to discuss the details of marriage. Helen had not yet thought of these, and she shrank bashfully from the subject, half sorry to have her dreamy revery so disturbed. But Mrs. Warner persisted.

"It is necessary to talk of it," she said, "for Hubert must leave us soon, and he cannot go till all is arranged. His first desire, rash boy that he is, was an immediate marriage, and to take you with him to Cuba. But I soon reasoned him out of that. You would be exposed to the acclimating fever, and it would never do; then there is always more or less cholera there in the summer. He is used to it, so there is no danger for him; but for you it would be dangerous. Besides this I have plans for you this summer. I can't let him monopolize you yet. We are all going to the springs this year, and you must go with us. I can't get along without you; so don't think of making any objections. When he comes home in the fall you can be married. It will be much the best time."

"I must go to my brother's, and be married there," said Helen.

"Nonsense! you will do no such thing — you will stay here, and we will have all the children come home and have a grand time. Hubert is the last one, and he has been something of a prodigal son, in keeping away from home so much; so we will kill the fatted calf, and eat, drink, and be merry. The children haven't all been at home together for a good many years, and they will enjoy it."

Thus she talked on, in her earnest, hopeful, practical manner, and Helen listened, realizing dimly that it was herself for whom all these plans were projected — she, who

had all her life been an orphan, and so long self-dependent, but who now was taken to the centre of a mother's heart, and received by a numerous family; and half conscious that with her sober, waking eyes, she was looking down this golden vista of the future, so bright that it seemed to belong only to the land of dreams.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

"And nowhere was there discontent,
Or pride, or scorn, or argument;
But all things, in that golden weather,
Seemed only to live and love together."

Swiftly the days sped on. O, happy days! Golden sands, dropped sparkling from the glass of Time, to gleam forever brightly amid the coarser and darker grains of common life.

The lovers were almost constantly together, for now that the treasure he had coveted was his own, Hubert grew miserly, and wished to monopolize every word and look.

His mother had no longer any occasion to call him slow and cool, for never was the most impulsive youth more exacting or more devoted. And Helen, happy beyond all her dreams or hopes, gave herself up half fearfully to the enjoyment of her new bliss, yielded gracefully to his loving tyranny, and perhaps liked him all the better that he persisted in watching over and waiting upon her, as if she had not been all her life independent and self-reliant.

Nothing more had been heard of the slave hunter or his hounds; but Michel had remained for a day or two

secreted in the barn, partly from policy, and partly from reluctance to bid his wife farewell. When she first met him at the appointed rendezvous, it had been her intention to run away with him; and it was that she might prepare herself for the journey he had consented to encounter this risk of discovery; but after Hubert's kindness to him on that eventful day, these simple souls came to the conclusion it would not be right for Kissy to *steal herself*, and in a prolonged and tearful discussion it was agreed that Michel should pursue his journey alone, and if he reached the land of freedom, he should earn money enough to send and buy her from Mr. Warner.

Hubert had asked no questions about him since the night he dismissed him from his chamber, and Kissy wisely kept her own counsel, so that few, even of the servants, suspected he was near. In truth, when the excitement of the moment was past, Hubert was not quite sure his father would approve the part he had acted in regard to Michel; and though there were few deeds of his life for which he had less cause to blush, there were none to which he would not rather have said, *Peccavi*, before a mixed audience of his friends and neighbors. Such is the force of public opinion. Thus strong is the influence of education and habit.

May day had come and past; and in that country May is, above all other months, the season of flowers. Then the earth, not yet reduced to sterility by the summer heat,

awakened from the short repose of winter, which is here a sleep, and not a death, as in colder climes, arrays herself in gorgeous robes of vivid green, fluttering every where full and free, crowns herself with roses, perfumes herself with delicious odors, and looks up exulting, to lay her flowery tribute at the feet of her lord, the sun.

It was on one of these afternoons, such as might have been in paradise before the fall, when the family were sitting together in the pleasant shade formed by the climbing roses that thickly covered the trellis work before the north piazza. Mrs. Warner and Helen were busy with some light work, while the children had been silently making wreaths, with which they had crowned every one present, not excepting Hubert, who was reading aloud, or his father, who had leaned back in his chair, with his handkerchief over his head, so comfortably asleep that his wife signed to Emma not to disturb him, and the wreath was dropped carefully over the handkerchief, where, as Angie whispered, laughing, "It did look so funny!"

The reading was ended, at length, and the moment the book was closed, both children exclaimed, "Now may we talk?" and forthwith began an indefinite amount of chattering.

"Why, the little tongues! how they gallop, after their long rest!" said Hubert, when he had listened a few moments.

"You know we *were* still, though you said we couldn't be," Emma cried, in triumph.

"It was an active sort of stillness; you weren't quiet one instant."

"Quiet? O, yes, you mean we moved about. Well, we had to, to get our flowers. See, I made that wreath. Don't Helen look pretty in it?"

"*Very*," said Hubert, emphatically; "only I think a myrtle wreath would look better."

"O uncle! myrtle isn't half so pretty as roses."

"Your uncle has a particular reason for preferring myrtle just now," said Mrs. Warner, with a sly glance at Helen, whose face glowed with a richer bloom than the damask roses which crowned her shining hair.

"Uncle, uncle, you know what you promised us, if we would keep still. A drive," shouted Angie.

"And you think you've earned it! What an instance of juvenile presumption!"

"I think we've all earned it; or, if we haven't, it will do us good," said Mr. Warner, rousing, and uncovering his face. "Go order the carriage, my son."

"How can we? There isn't room for all of us, for uncle says he don't like to ride three on a seat," said Emma, pausing thoughtfully, with her finger on her lip.

"He can stay at home, then," replied her grandfather, demurely; "or, stay! I have a better plan. You, children, and your grandmother and uncle Hubert can go in the carriage, and Miss Helen and I will go in the buggy. Won't that do?"

"We can all go that way, only—" and the child hesitated, and looked in shy perplexity from her uncle to Helen.

"Only what?" asked Mr. Warner, much amused.

"Only I don't believe uncle will like you to drive Miss Helen," she answered, diffidently.

"See the feminine acuteness!" exclaimed Mr. Warner, clapping his hands. "See the womanly instinct! The dear little souls can see through a millstone before they get their eyes open. And what do you suppose Miss Helen would say? Would she object to it, Emma?"

But Emma, a sensitive, bashful child, was by this time so embarrassed by the mirth which she but dimly understood, that she was nearly as much relieved as was Helen, when Hubert came to the rescue.

"Child," he said, with mock gravity, "I honor you; you have discovered a degree of insight into the fitness of things for which you deserve all praise. You are at once an example and a reproof to your venerable ancestor. Since he has shown himself so incapable of managing this expedition, *I* will take the direction of affairs into my own hands. Come, let us go find John," and he held out his hand to her.

She drew a long breath, and looked up, her honest little face scowling with the effort to understand him, and said, "O, uncle does use such long words!"

"They are all in the dictionary," replied he, "and I know the meaning of every one of them."

"Do you?" she said, in innocent wonder at such a vast amount of erudition, for her daily spelling lesson was the one trial of her life; "how long it must have taken you to find out the meanings!"

"Quite a long time. See that *you* never get beyond your depth in the dictionary," replied he, his gravity yielding, as he watched her sober face.

"I will go with you," said Helen, "for I want to see Kissy about some muslins she was to starch for me;" and they went into the yard together.

On the steps of the kitchen, the boy Gus was sitting, between the knees of an old negro, whose white head and appearance of general decrepitude showed him to be a retired private, no longer in active service with the army of servants, but well cared for in his honorary idleness. Between his stumps of teeth he held a jewsharp, on which he was performing with great earnestness, and Gus, biting desperately at a similar instrument, was endeavoring to imitate him, with his queer round head twisted sidewise, and his eyes nearly rolled out of their sockets in the vain effort to look at his own mouth and uncle Noll's at the same moment.

"Well, Gus, how do you come on with the fine arts?" said Hubert. "Is he an apt scholar, Uncle Noll?"

Uncle Noll released his buzzing instrument, and hold-

ing it tenderly between his thumb and finger, looked thoughtfully at the boy, and answered, with a consequential air, as if his opinion was of the utmost importance, —

"Well, massa, he apt do good many tings — dat boy — but dis nigger ain't clar 'bout he gettin' edicated; I speck he won't neber make an Orfus."

"A what?" said Hubert, laughing.

"A Orfus. Now, massa, don't go making fool of ole nigger. Sartin Mass Hubert know 'bout dat feller. He use play on de jewsharp."

"You mean David," said Helen; "he used to play on the *Jews'* harp;" but the old man shook his head negatively, perplexed, yet obstinate.

"Do you mean Orpheus?" said Hubert.

"O, yes; I know massa know dat feller. I hear Miss Helen tell de chillen 'bout him."

"What did she say?"

"I don't zackly 'member what she say, but he great singer up dere where she raised — play on de banjo, too."

"Good," cried Hubert, laughing. "Miss Helen must be getting out a new classical dictionary. What tune were you trying to teach Cæsar Augustus?"

"I'se tryin' larn him long syne."

"Long syne?" said Helen, inquiringly.

"Yes, miss," replied he; "*ole* long syne — de *ole* fellar."

This caused such a burst of laughter that Noll looked

up astonished, unconscious of having said any thing funny.

"Well," said Hubert, "if you can keep Gus still long enough to complete his musical education, I hope you'll do it; for nobody else can keep him out of mischief. He never learned any thing before."

"O Mass Hubert," piped Gus's shrill voice, for he had been fidgeting with impatience to get into the conversation, "I'se de whole time larnin' — I larns heaps."

Hubert replied carelessly, and turned away to speak to Rafe about the horses, while Helen went into the kitchen. When she came out, Gus was still sitting on the steps, but old Noll had gone to see the horses harnessed; for he was once coachman, and seemed now to consider the stable and all its contents as his own property, which he magnanimously allowed Mr. Warner to use, and Rafe, with his compeers, to take care of.

The carriages were brought round to the front door, and in fine spirits the family disposed themselves for a drive. Helen and Hubert went in the buggy, of course; and as he gathered up the reins, John asked respectfully where they were going.

"To Old Granby," Hubert said.

"That is too far," interposed Mrs. Warner.

"Not a bit of it, this fine afternoon. I want Helen to see it. A deserted village is quite in her line; she'll write us a poem upon it."

"Well, then, on these conditions we'll go," said Mrs. Warner, as Helen made a hasty disclaimer.

"*En avant* — go it, John," cried Hubert, and the carriages started.

The road lay through the pine woods, past lonely plantations, into hollows where the air was heavy with perfume, from thickets of flowering shrubs and trees; and every where the sunshine glorified the landscape, and the songs of birds seemed answering to their own gleeful voices; for on this unfrequented way there was nothing to restrain their mirth, and they talked, they laughed, they sang, they bandied jokes and repartees from one carriage to another, with such occasional quiet as made the gayety refreshing. And there were such episodes of sentiment in the single carriage as might be expected, when John drove his horses too fast, or the winding road for a time isolated them, or the hollows shut them from sight.

In all the party there was but one face that wore no smile, but one pair of eyes to which the sunshine looked dim, but one heavy heart; and he — who thought of him? Who cared that, as they passed a certain deserted plantation, John looked up the lonely avenue with a smothered groan, and dropped his head upon his breast to hide his tears? It was so *unreasonable* in him to care that his wife and children were gone from him forever! It was so ungrateful in him to prefer any thing to his master's wishes!

They came out at length on a flat and somewhat elevated plain, divided by broken fences into fields which were bare of trees and grass, but supported a scanty growth of broom sedge, and the thorns and weeds which indicate worn-out and uncultivated land. At a little distance, near the river, stood three or four buildings, which had evidently once been used for stores; and along the silent, sandy streets, that stretched away from this spot, were situated a number of houses in various stages of dilapidation and decay.

A few old and half-dead fruit trees grew in the gardens attached to some of them, and every where the flowering vines and shrubs, which careful hands had once planted, now ran in wild luxuriance over the broken fences, and through the windowless casements, and even to the tops of the broken chimneys.

"Here," said Hubert, as they drove slowly along, "here is 'Old Granby.' At the time of the revolution it was a considerable town, and the scene of quite a skirmish in the week succeeding the battle of the Cowpens. But 'Ichabod' is written on its walls; its glory has departed long ago, and now there are few to do it reverence."

"Is it entirely deserted?"

"Entirely. Goldsmith never dreamed of one so utterly forsaken of human beings. Nothing lives here now but ghosts — and 'rats and mice, and such small deer.'"

"And memories of the past," said Helen. "O that those walls could in some way make known their own histories!"

"I'll tell you what could be done," said Hubert. "Some of the 'mediums' so plenty nowadays might be brought here to interrogate the ghosts who constantly 'revisit the glimpses of the moon' about these old houses. If we may believe the negroes, it would be a grand place for a 'circle.'"

"Pooh!" replied Helen, with an expression of disgust. "The spirits *they* raise are all either vulgar or nonsensical. But what grand and stately ghosts would glide over these barren fields in the still moonlight, and pace those dusky halls, and look out those vine-shaded windows? I declare there is one now!" she exclaimed, grasping his arm, with a sudden start of terror, and pointing to the upper window of a house they were just then passing.

"Where?" said Hubert, wondering at her abrupt change of manner.

"In that window. It has gone now, but I declare I saw a face there. I know I did."

"Shall we stop and pay our respects to his ghostship? This must have been quite a respectable mansion in its day, and if that was the owner, no doubt he would be polite enough to answer any inquiries you might wish to make."

"You are laughing at me; yet I did see a face

there. But drive on, for now your father has left the carriage, and is beckoning to us."

They rode forward accordingly, and joined the rest of their party, who were now standing by the roadside. But what was Hubert's surprise, on alighting, to see Master Gus quietly getting down from behind the buggy, where he had enjoyed the drive, unknown to any one.

"You young scamp," exclaimed Hubert, raising his whip, "what business had you to come without leave?"

But the boy, lifting his hands deprecatingly, and opening his eyes wide in pretended fear, hastened to exclaim, "O, now, Mass Hubert! I didn't! *I 'ain't seen a single thing you's done!—I donno nothin' what you been talkin' 'bout!* O Mass Hubert!"

His insinuation, and his attitude, together, were entirely too comical, and in the peals of laughter that ensued, the child, as usual, escaped further chiding for his impudence.

They walked on over a wide field, to the place where once the village church had stood. Not a vestige of it remained, for the negroes from the neighboring plantations had confiscated this church property to their own use, and taken the bricks of which it was composed to build the chimneys to their huts. But in the graveyard that had been placed behind it, the trees and rosebushes which were once set there by the loving care of those who mourned for the departed, had grown to a thicket,

which was literally impenetrable, because of the briers and vines that twined around the stems, and, running along the ground, stretched their arms in every direction, as if to guard the repose of the ancient dead.

Mourned and mourner were long since forgotten; the eyes that slept and the eyes that wept were turned alike to dust; but silently, year by year, had nature been building up, with ever renewed vigor, this green and beautiful mausoleum over her children's graves. The thoughtless little ones were chasing each other about the field with shouts of glee, and their grandparents, leaning on the fence, were trying to decipher the inscriptions on the nearest stones, and recalling to mind such of their acquaintances as were descended from these old families; but Hubert and Helen wandered away arm in arm to the river bank, and sat down in the shade of the trees.

There was something weird-like in the soft sunshine and quiet of the deserted spot, and the sound of mirth and human voices seemed to desecrate the hour and the place.

There are times when natural sights and sounds have a strange power over the soul, isolating it from the present, and opening long vistas into the dreamy, unknown future, or the scarcely less shadowy past. Then vague memories stir in the heart, and feelings long ignored reassert their existence. Then the rushing of the waters, and the sighing of the winds, seem no longer the sounds of

material things, but spirit voices full of prophetic meanings, or solemn echoes from years that are fled.

Mournfully out of the past these voices call us — mournfully, and ever more and more faintly as the years roll by; voices from that happy time when life was so fresh and full of hope, when those walked by our side and clasped our hands who are now far parted from us by mountains and seas, or by a narrow coffin lid and six feet of earth. Well is it for us, if forgetfulness and a changeful heart have not been to us more fatal sunderers than distance or the grave. Well for us, if those hands would now grasp ours with the warm pressure of other days, and those eyes light up with the sunshine of early friendship; for in this shifting and tumultuous world many a meeting has been sadder than partings can be. From such reveries as these Helen was aroused by Hubert, who laid his hand on hers, saying, —

"You are sad; I see the shadow in your eyes."

"I have been listening to what the river is saying," she replied. "Do you not hear an undertone in its murmur, telling of all that was thought, and felt, and known, by those who once lived busy lives in this spot, so quiet now? How strangely the ceaseless whirl and rush of the waters between these high banks contrasts with the entire repose of their last resting-place!"

"There is a sacredness in human life," said Hubert, "which we involuntarily acknowledge, by the veneration

with which we regard old places, and the melancholy pleasure we take in surrounding ourselves with memories of the departed. The earth is centuries older than any thing upon it; but mother earth gains from us not one tithe of the fond respect with which we regard edifices built by human hands, and through which for many years the stream of mortal life has flowed."

"Is it so?" said Helen; "do we not rather reverence death than life? Do we not make demigods and heroes of men when dead, to whom, when living, we should apply far more prosaic terms? And is it not because, looking at them through the soft and solemn light that shines from out the portals of the grave, we see them transfigured and glorified, and all commonplace and trivial acts are heightened in consequence of their influence upon the soul's progression through the grand and mysterious eternity?"

"Perhaps you are right," replied Hubert; "but still I think it is our humanity, linking us as it does with all the past and the future, which invests these places with such peculiar interest. It may be, also, that the mind ever seeks to escape from the present, which is so often dull and tame, to revel in romantic ideas of the past. The people whose names are on these gravestones, and those who lie in nameless graves, may have been, many of them, very stupid and uncouth, and the history of their lives one uninteresting series of commonplace events; and yet we, sitting here this afternoon, are not at all inclined to

think so, but are wishing we could have known them, and looking with envy upon the old walls, which, though they may have had '*ears*,' certainly have no *tongues*."

"Yes, indeed," Helen said, "all the men who lived here were knights *sans peur et sans reproche*, and all the women beautiful and true. How bravely they sent their heroes forth to war! how anxiously they looked for their return! how eagerly they welcomed them if they came unharmed! how proudly, if covered with honorable wounds!"

"Yes," said Hubert, with a sly smile, "and how amiable and wise they were! They never scolded the servants before folks, or let the children go dirty, or left their husbands' clothes unmended, or the buttons off their shirts, or allowed the bread to be sour, or the beef roasted to rags — in short, the women who lived in the days of yore never subjected their families to any of the minor miseries of human life."

"Scoffer," said Helen, smiling in her turn, "you deny your own theory, that it is our common humanity which invests this place with interest; for surely, '*to err* is human.' What if they did do all that? They were grand and heroic, nevertheless; and how dare you cast dust upon the white garments of their immortality? Again I say, O that those walls could be made to reveal the secret of those lives, and the history of those events."

"If there is any truth in the theory that the different

waves of sound have different forms, why could not walls be so prepared that the transitory touch of air can imprint itself, as the shadow does upon a daguerreotype plate? The process of preparation may be a little difficult to discover, but it would not be much more strange than that by which pictures are made of shadows."

"I am afraid the invention would not meet with equal favor; for who would dare to talk," said Helen, laughing, "if conscious that every word would be preserved?"

"People would have to put their heads in a box, when they wanted to tell secrets," replied Hubert, "and then burn the box."

"Kindling wood would be plenty, I fear," said Helen. "But hark! your father is calling us, I believe."

They went back to the place where the family was waiting them, and after a little social chat over a luncheon which Mrs. Warner had provided, they proceeded to the carriages. Gus was ordered to take a seat with John, which command he obeyed with many an antic and grin, and Hubert waited till they had started, so as to be sure that this time, at least, they were free from *espionage*.

As they drove slowly along the sandy, turf-grown street, Helen said she wished she had taken some flowers or leaves as a memento of this delightful afternoon.

"It is not yet too late," replied Hubert, "for yonder is the house where you saw that veritable ghost, and we will gather a bouquet of wild roses from the garden."

"That will do nicely," she replied; and when they reached there, Hubert tied his horse to the broken fence, and helped her from the chaise.

The gate was gone from the front garden, but the paved walk to the door was yet visible, amid the wilderness of weeds and thorns that had covered the beds; and they trod lightly over it, unconsciously subdued by the entire stillness and desolation around them.

"It seems *uncanny* — I declare I am half afraid to be here," said Helen, in a low tone, as they paused before the front door, and Hubert commenced pulling down the roses that clustered over it.

"I feel the ghostly chill, unsusceptible as I am," replied he; "but it is a sort of a stimulating horror, and I have a strong inclination to enter and beard his ghostship in his den.

"How many years do you suppose it has been since these heavy shutters were unbarred? — by mortal hands I mean, for of course these 'airy sprites' let in the moonlight when they please."

As he spoke, he shook the lock of the door, and it gave way in his hands so suddenly that he nearly lost his balance.

"Why, really, this wood is more decayed than I supposed," he said, as he examined the casements whence the rusty iron bolts had been so easily withdrawn. "How pale you look, Helen! Come, let's see what there is in here."

He took her hand and drew her into the hall. It was a large, square house, and the lofty ceiling, the heavy cornices and carved wood work, showed that it must have been inhabited by persons of wealth. Broad stairs ascended on one side to the second story; and through a large window in the upper hall, now without glass or shutters, the setting sun was casting long rays of light along the dusty air. Cobwebs blackened the walls, and the dust which they had disturbed flew in clouds around them. Cautiously pushing open a door at the foot of the stairs they looked into a large, empty room, and on the opposite side of the hall was one of similar size. From this a door opened into another room; and as they entered it, Helen grasped the hand she held with a faint exclamation. Hubert started at the same moment.

"Hush! do you hear something?" said he.

"I certainly heard a footstep," she whispered.

They stood still and listened, and had nearly concluded they had been mistaken, when it came again. It was a sound in the room over them, as of a person stepping barefooted across the floor. Again they looked at each other, and Helen was so pale that Hubert said, —

"You do not really believe in ghosts?"

"No, but what can it be? Nobody has walked these lower floors for a long time; for I noticed particularly that there were no tracks in the dust."

"True," said Hubert, struck with the fact; "and yet it must be some human being, or perhaps it is a dog."

"It was not like a dog's step; and you remember that face I saw at the window."

"It may be a negro, only I never saw a negro who would dare go into a house that had the reputation of being haunted. I will go with you out of this dusty place to the open air, and then examine for myself what this mystery may be."

At that moment they heard the step once more, but farther away than before, and then instantly a crash and a heavy fall, which was answered by a thousand echoes from the empty rooms. There was something to thrill the stoutest nerves in such a sound, heard in that dusky light, in that lonely spot; and, grasping Hubert's arm, Helen hurried him with involuntary speed out of doors; but when there, he disengaged himself, and, laughing at her panic, bade her remain there while he returned for an explanation. In a few moments he reappeared in the upper hall, and called Helen to come to him.

From one of the chambers a door opened into an entry, from which stairs descended to a back door, that stood slightly ajar; and over these a step-ladder had been fixed, by which to ascend to the garret. This, untrodden for years, had broken from its fastenings by a sudden weight, and carried with its fall the unlucky negro who had attempted to ascend it. He lay on the stairs, as if dead, when Hubert found him; but having dragged him with some difficulty into the chamber, he saw that he

began to breathe faintly, and show signs of returning consciousness.

Helen, with a woman's pity, loosened his neck handkerchief, and then, as he turned his face to the light, she started back, exclaiming, "It is Michel! How came he here?"

"Confound that Michel! he is always falling into my hands," said Hubert, with good-natured impatience.

"You surely don't regret what you did for him," said Helen, looking reproachfully at her lover.

"No. Helping runaway niggers isn't the business I should choose, generally; but this fellow's circumstances were peculiar, and the man who hunted him had placed us in an awkward and perilous position; and moreover, it was the first request you made me, and it would have been a bad precedent not to have granted it. But what has possessed the fellow to linger around here so long? and why need he try running up that ladder, which he might have known would fall? It is a wonder he didn't break his neck; and now if he has broken any of his bones, what shall be done with him? If the negroes get wind of the affair, it will get out, and we shall be in an unpleasant position, unless we return him to his owner."

"You surely won't think of doing that," interrupted Helen.

"I don't want to; I *won't;* but how am I to take care of him here? You know I must leave home in a few days."

"We must try and manage some way. Poor Kissy!"

"She must not know of it, unless she can keep it from father and mother; and she can't do that. You know it would not do, as they are situated, for them to countenance such proceedings as we contemplate. No, the matter is in my hands, and though I don't think I was exactly cut out for a philanthropist, I will try and act the 'good Samaritan' for this once."

"Perhaps he isn't hurt so badly as you fear," Helen said; and so it proved. Michel had been completely stunned, and it was some time before he recovered his senses, but no bones were broken, and at first he thought himself unhurt; but when he attempted to walk, he experienced such an intense pain in his right foot, that he sank to the floor with a groan.

Hubert examined it, and found the ankle bruised and strained, and a bunch which indicated a dislocation of some of the smaller bones of the foot. His knowledge of surgery was very slight, but he manipulated and bound up the suffering member as well as he could, with the aid of Helen's scarf. Michel looked on with a face of the most intense anxiety, and when they had finished he again attempted to walk, crossed the room once or twice, limping badly, and then sitting down on the floor, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

Few words had hitherto passed between them, for they had all been too anxious and hurried for conversation; but

now, touched by his sorrow, Hubert laid his hand kindly on the negro's shoulder, and said abruptly, "What, Michel! Are you such a baby as to cry for a little pain?"

"O massa, 'tain't de *pain*," said Michel, in dejected tones; "ef it 'ud ony done broke my arm, now, I wouldn't cared; for 'pears like a feller's arms ain't no 'count, much, when he's walkin'; but how's I ever gwine git away to de free state wid dis yer foot achin' so, and ony t'other foot to tote me? 'Pears like there ain't nothin' I can do now. I mought as well die as any thing."

Hubert and Helen looked at each other in dismay; for it was plain enough that Michel could do no more walking for some time, at least; but after a little pause, Helen said, compassionately, —

"Try and keep your courage, Michel, and we will help you as far as we can. Can't you remain here till your foot is better? How long have you been here?"

"Thank'ee, miss; I ain't been here so bery long but what I mought stay longer; for I reckon dere ain't so many folks wants to come here but dere's room left for me," said Michel, as a grim smile flitted over his face. "But de massa ob dis house don't gib his boarders nothin' to eat, and I dono how I'se to get any thing more when I done eat up what Kissy gib me."

"We can send you something to eat," said Hubert; "how long will your provisions last?"

"I reckon I can make 'em last two, three days longer."

"How long have you been here?"

"Ony since night 'fore last."

"Why did you stay so long at one place?" said Hubert, a little sternly. "I thought you had left a week ago."

"O, please, massa, ebery day I think I'd go, and Kissy she'd coax me powerful to stay one day more; and 'sides dat, massa, dere ain't half de danger o' bein' catched when I does get started, if I stay roun' here a while, till dey gets tired lookin' for me. Dem dogs runs like de debil, and dere ain't mighty little use tryin' to get away from 'em. De safest way is to hide, and I know'd dey neber would look for me here."

"So you staid with Kissy till you were afraid to stay longer, and then came here?"

"Zactly, massa," said Michel, who began to be in better spirits, as he saw his friends intended still to assist him.

"Are you not afraid to stay here alone?" asked Helen, half smiling.

"Well, now, miss, I can't zactly say I ain't 't all scare," he replied, glancing timidly around; "but den, what's a nigger gwine do? I must go *somewhere*, and if dere be sich tings as dey tells 'bout here, I'se in hopes dey won't tetch me. I ain't neber done 'em no harm, and least ways I neber did hear tell dat dey eber toted niggers back to dere massas, like live folks does most allers. So you see I jist makes up my mind I'm safest here, any way."

"Plato, thou reasonest well;" exclaimed Hubert, laughing. "I didn't give you credit for so much sense, and I am pretty sure you won't find any thing here worse looking than yourself."

"Well, massa, ebery ting was still nuff last night."

"Then if you will stay here, where they will never think of looking for you, I will try and devise some means of helping you away. If I can, I will buy you, and take you with me to Cuba, next week. You won't be able to walk much for a long time, probably, and if you should try to travel in the woods, your foot would soon become so much inflamed that you could not use it at all. If I can get you to Cuba, where you can have a doctor attend to it, you may soon get well enough to go to work, and then we will make some other arrangement."

"O massa, I won't neber run away from you," said Michel, eagerly.

"I don't mean you shall; for you may arrange matters to suit yourself. You are a brave fellow, and deserve to be free. I will send John to you in a day or two, for I think I can trust him; and meantime, you can keep quiet here, and mind you don't let any body see you. Don't speak to any stray nigger that may come along."

"I'll be careful, massa; and you don't know how I thanks yer for what yer done, and what you'se gwine do. I hopes some time I ken *show* yer how I blesses yer — I can't neber tell."

"Well, keep up a good heart, and you'll come out of this scrape, in spite of your lame foot," said Hubert, giving him his hand, which the poor fellow pressed to his lips, with tears of gratitude; and after a few more words, his friends left him, for the short twilight was now fading, and they were anxious not to be too far behind the rest of their party, lest their absence should be noticed and commented upon.

"That Michel is a fellow of mettle," said Hubert, as, having carefully closed the door, he joined Helen at the carriage. "I saw his heart sank within him, as we came away; but there he will remain, though no doubt he expects to battle with the powers of darkness. If he can do this for the sake of being free, he deserves his freedom, and he shall have it. To appreciate his courage, one must know how devoutly the negroes believe in spirits, and how mortally they fear them."

"*I* shouldn't like to stay there alone," said Helen, looking back, as they drove away. "Nothing less than the evils he dreads could induce me to remain there in utter darkness and loneliness; and I fear his foot will be very painful; such injuries are apt to be."

"Poor fellow! between his fears and his pains, he will have a hard time," said Hubert; "but I don't know that we can do any better for him. His only safety lies in concealment."

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

> "Existence may be borne, and the deep root
> Of life and sufferance makes its firm abode
> In bare and desolated bosoms. * * * *
> But ever and anon, of griefs subdued
> There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
> Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness endured."

Deep hidden in a shadowy nook of the forest stood a lowly cottage, overgrown with vines, and surrounded by a small garden, where straggling weeds and bushes grew together, covering the ill-kept beds, and obtruding their tangled branches into the grass-grown walks. A winding footpath, evidently little trodden, led from the county road half a mile away, to this lonely dwelling, inhabited only by an old negro and his wife, who, infirm and half blind, were content to vegetate here,—

> "The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

They were seated together on the doorstep, silently smoking their pipes, and basking in the sunshine of this warm May afternoon, when they saw a traveller on horseback slowly approaching through the trees.

"Somebody done loss dere way, I reckon," said the old

man, sententiously, as he removed the stump of his pipe, and stared at the unwonted appearance.

"Don't see nothing," replied his wife, blinking through the smoke with her dim eyes.

"You! yer old blind nigger! who spected yer did see? Dere somebody comin' by, though; comin' here, too; done got off he horse. By de Lord," added the old man, starting up with sudden vivacity of tone and manner, "I 'clare for goodness, I b'lieves it am massa."

He hobbled towards the gate, where the traveller was now dismounting; his wife followed, as fast as her rheumatic limbs would allow of locomotion; but the horse was hitched, and the gate opened, before they could proffer their services, and Colonel Bell — for it was he — advanced towards them, and holding out a hand to each, spoke in a cordial and cheerful tone; to which they responded by repeating a dozen times, "Bress you, colonel, massa; you done come back see de ole place once more; how d'ye, massa, dis long time? how d'ye, *now*? Ole place look pretty well, 'siderin'; we does bes' we ken, but we'se gettin' ole, massa."

"You have been getting old this some time past," said the colonel at length, with a sad smile, as they went up the walk together. "You are comfortable here, aren't you? The overseer keeps you supplied from the plantation?"

"Yes, massa, we'se comfor'ble, but we'se gettin ole. Aunt Hepsy here, she mos' blind, and I'se lame, but we'se comfor'ble — O, yes."

"O, yes, we'se comfor'ble," chimed in the old wife, and they both shook their gray wool, and sat down again on the doorstep, over which their master had passed into the house, casting a thoughtful glance at each other, and a compassionate one back at him. He noticed it with a sigh, almost of envy, at the contented old age of this humble pair. They heard the sigh, and thinking it was given to the memories that had drawn him thither, the negro said respectfully, —

"De key am hangin' in de ole place, massa. I knows ye don't neber feel like talkin' when yer comes here now; but we'se powerful glad to see yer, and so we keeps chatterin'. De ole woman takes de key wunst in a while, to see dat ebery ting am right in de rooms; but she don't neber tetch nothin'."

As he spoke, Colonel Bell turned towards a door at the opposite end of the little room where he stood, which was furnished in the most simple manner, and evidently served for parlor, bedroom, and kitchen, to its inhabitants. Beside the door hung a key, which he took from its nail, and, turning it in the lock, entered the adjoining apartment. There were no shutters to the windows, but the luxuriant vines formed a screen without, and within white muslin curtains, overhung with damask draperies, let in the softened light. This little parlor was one of a suit of rooms, all tiny in their proportions, but furnished with such exquisite taste and luxury, that to enter them from

the rude antechamber, seemed like stepping from the every-day world into a fairy palace. But dust lay on the precious things, and the air was close and heavy, as if for many years its stillness had been unbroken by any breeze from the outer atmosphere.

Colonel Bell stood still, and, looking about him, yielded himself entirely to the recollections which thronged every moment more rapidly, and finding a melancholy pleasure, even in his pain.

In one corner a fanciful case of ebony held some choice books; here and there chairs of curious device invited him to rest; a few pictures on the walls led the eye away into shadowy valleys, or smiling, sunlit plains; on the table stood a workbox, inlaid with pearl. It was half open, and in its velvet compartments lay a handkerchief of linen cambric, with a tiny gold thimble carelessly caught in its folds, just as it had been left when the busy worker was summoned hastily away to fold her hands in death. A guitar case hung over the mantel-piece. He opened it, and the faded pink ribbon attached to the instrument fluttered down and fell on his face with a caressing touch, that thrilled him like a welcome from some living thing. He struck a few notes, but they sounded like a requiem, and he closed the case with a smothered groan, and went his way, pacing with stealthy steps through the apartment, and thinking how every thing that

13 *

met his eye was connected with hope, happiness, and love, which had gone from him forever.

In the innermost room, where, from a silver arrow fastened to the ceiling, clouds of lace fell down to shroud a bed whose snowy whiteness mortal form should never press again, several pictures hung upon the walls, hidden by curtains from the light and dust. He raised the drapery, and looked at each successively. They were simple drawings, done in crayon or colored chalk, and betokening more genius than culture. Why were they so much more valuable than the paintings in the parlor, which were gems of art? O, he remembered the still, green places, where a laughing face had looked up to his, as he guided the unskilled fingers in the mysteries of design; and he smiled sadly as he seemed again to hear the piquant utterance, the flashes of mirth, the eager anxiety to please him, and the delight in his approbation that had made those drawing lessons treasures which no money could purchase.

It was a strange thing, this one love of his life, which could survive time and the grave, and even now sway with warm impulses a heart the world had indurated and worn out. Before the last picture he paused longest. It was a portrait of himself, when he was much younger than now, and a far different man; but it was not at his own face he looked, though that might well have made him thoughtful. Behind his face another was drawn, as if looking over his shoulder; faintly drawn, and left

unfinished; but these shadowy lineaments had power to move him to tears. It was the picture of a girlish beauty, with smiling lips, and deep, thoughtful eyes. God had been merciful to her, and she had died young.

After an hour spent thus, Colonel Bell unlocked a side door which opened into the garden, and getting over the low fence, bent his steps towards a monument of white marble, which gleamed through the shining green of the oaks that grew around the little knoll where it stood, just visible from the house. Walking slowly along, wrapped in reveries of the past, he hardly raised his eyes from the ground until he entered the circle of trees; and then what was his astonishment to see, in this place which he had expected to find so solitary, a stranger seated on the turf, with his head resting against the marble!

At the sound of his footsteps the man looked up, and with a faint exclamation rose to his feet and held out his hand. Colonel Bell barely touched it, with a cold civility, and then first finding words for his surprise, he ejaculated, —

"Robert Bernard! here?"

"To be sure," replied the man, rather testily. "Do you suppose nobody comes here but yourself?"

Colonel Bell, leaning his elbow against the monument, looked at him a long time, dreamily and sadly, as if he was striving to separate the images of the past from the harsh realities of the present, to which this voice and

figure had recalled him. Presently he said, not unkindly, —

"It is several years since I have been here. I supposed every body else had quite forgotten her. Do you come often?"

"Not very; it's too still and ghostlike here. But I saw something t'other day that made me want to see, with my own eyes, if this yer stone stood square and firm where we put it."

"Why?"

"Because I half expected to see it pushed askew, and the hole underneath empty; for, William Bell, I saw *her* very image, face and form, living and breathing."

"You must be mistaken," said Colonel Bell, uneasily.

"Mistaken! Do you suppose I don't remember Corilla? Do you suppose I shouldn't know her again?"

"What do you mean? People are often very like each other when there isn't the slightest relationship."

"But here there was relationship. William Bell, them two children didn't die as you told me they did. I suspected it then, and I know it now; and *you* know it too. I see it in your face."

"You are talking the most perfect nonsense," said Colonel Bell, trying to disguise his inquietude. "They *are* dead; *she* is dead; every body is dead. Come, let us come away from here."

They walked away in a direction that [illegible] from the cottage, but Bernard still persisted.

"If you really think so, you are mistaken. Corilla's child is living at Mr. Warner's, and passes for white. If you don't believe me you can go there and see."

"How came you there?" said the colonel, with some asperity.

"No matter how," replied Bernard, a blush of shame crossing his sunburnt visage. "I went there, and I was insulted, and I mean to be revenged. At first I was ready to kill young Warner — he treated me like a dog — but when I came to reflect upon it, blood is hard to keep hid, and no man likes the set of a hemp cravat; and besides, I hung round there till I found an easier way of making him smart. He'll take care next time how he kicks me, I reckon."

"What do you mean to do?" asked his companion, anxiously.

"I find he means to marry that girl. Hubert don't know who she is, and I reckon she don't know either. I was just coming over here to see you about it, for I may need your testimony, as I suppose they'd bring it into court, before they would give up that she was a nigger. Jingoes! won't I humble their pride? — won't I make my gentleman squirm?"

"Bernard, do you forget that if your suspicion is true she is my child also?" said the colonel, in a tone that

made his companion start, and look at him with a puzzled air.

"Yes, I know. But you gentlemen don't generally make much count of them kind of children; except to ask a high price for them sometimes on account of the breed," he added, with a brutal laugh.

Colonel Bell suppressed his disgust, and replied calmly, "But you cannot think I would take the pains you suppose me to have taken, if I did not intend that these children should never know of their obscure birth."

"Well, now," replied he, hesitating, "I know you did really like Corilla, and no mistake, and you seemed powerfully cut down when she died; and so for her sake I suppose you do have a different sort of feeling for her children from what most men would have. But then I thought you wouldn't carry it so far as to spite an old friend; and my heart is set on this business, colonel. The girl can't be half so much to you as my plan is to me. Come now, say you will stand by a fellow, for the sake of old times." Bernard's utter brutality and obtuseness disarmed the anger they provoked, and yet his companion remembered with a shudder, that a word, a breath, from this depraved creature, could blast his dearest hopes; and a cold sweat gathered on his forehead as he walked on, without replying.

At length, with a total change of manner, he said, "It is at least a dozen years since I saw you, Bob. What

have you been doing with yourself all this time? You don't look quite in the trim you used to, when we were schoolmates and cronies."

"No," replied the other, with an oath, "my father wasn't made of money, and my wife didn't die and leave me five or six plantations; and so while you have been swimming, I have sunk."

"And now — excuse me — you are poor?"

"You may well say that — Job was a fool to me for poverty."

"Where do you live? Have you been staying in this part of the country?"

"Lately I have. I've seen you sometimes when you haven't noticed me"

"Have you? Where were you? What is your business now?"

"Well," said Bernard, looking down, "my business ain't exactly what you aristocratic gents like to keep company with; though, hang it, if I can see any difference between hunting niggers and keeping 'em to be hunted. I keep dogs."

Almost involuntarily Colonel Bell shrank from him, exclaiming, "Is it possible you have come to this? *You*, the son of a gentleman!"

"Well, now, what is the harm of it?" said the man, with a bravado air. "Your niggers run away, you send me after 'em with my dogs, and I catch 'em. What right

have you, and the like of you, to stick up your noses at me?"

"I disapprove of such things altogether," said Colonel Bell, seriously.

"If you do, your neighbors don't; and, by the way, it was one of your niggers I was after when I went to Mr. Warner's, and so happened to get sight of that girl. Hang me, if I didn't think it was Corilla herself. I never was so struck up in my life."

"I have sold none of my servants lately. You must be mistaken about that," said the colonel.

"Your wife has, then — a fellow by the name of Michel. Mr. Warner owns his wife, and the dogs tracked him there, and I should have got him if they hadn't protected him."

"My wife!" murmured the colonel. "Ay, I'll warrant there can be no mischief to me that she hasn't a hand in."

"What's that you're saying?" asked Bernard.

"Nothing. But tell me, would you not rather be rich, and live at your ease, and be received in the society you used to frequent when we were so intimate, than to live as you do now?"

"To be sure I would. I ain't a fool. But when a man once gets well *down*, he can't get up again very easy."

"But suppose a friend should help him up, and set

him on his feet. Suppose I, who have more money than I know what to do with, should give you the surplus, and introduce you into society."

The man looked at him askance a moment, and said, with a leer, "Out of pure friendship, of course?"

"Yes, and because *a gentleman* can have more honorable revenge upon one who has offended him than by traducing and insulting a defenceless girl."

"But don't you see that I couldn't call him to account for *this* offence, without losing all my new-found respectability; and it is for *this* I want to get him under my feet —I want to touch him in the tenderest place. He would rather fight fifty duels than see her belong to me; and hang it if I don't buy her the minute she's in the market," he said, snapping his fingers, with a savage grin.

A lurid gleam shot like lightning athwart his companion's face, but he restrained himself by a strong effort, and replied, "Yet the revenge will be soon over, and perhaps he would thank you after all for saving him from the disgrace of a marriage with one of the inferior race."

"Hang it! so he might. I never thought of that," exclaimed Bernard, with an expression of chagrin.

"Nothing is more likely," replied the colonel, pursuing this unexpected advantage; "for if your suspicions are correct, it would only be an act of friendship to tell him of them."

"I'll tell you what it is, William Bell; you don't hum-

bug *me* with all this talk about *suspicions*, and the like of that," said Bernard, suddenly, after a short pause. "For some reason or other you want me to keep this secret. Now tell me what you'll give me to hold my tongue."

"How much will you take?" replied he, infinitely relieved to find his companion had no scruples of delicacy with regard to being purchased.

"Let me see. Say five thousand dollars down, and the rest we can agree about six months hence. I can't quite conclude in a minute what I shall do with myself, and so I can't tell how much I shall want. You'll be liberal, of course?"

"Any thing in reason. Your present terms I agree to willingly, and you will bind yourself for these considerations never to breathe to any mortal your suspicions respecting this young lady."

"For that matter, I reckon my word is as good as my bond," said Bernard, with a short laugh; "but we are old friends, and I'll play fair with you. But now tell me honestly, what can induce you to make this bargain if you don't *know* I can prove that girl to be Corilla's child?"

"Because it would be very unpleasant for me to be drawn into such an affair with a family so respectable as the Warners, and I like this young lady so well that I should be sorry to have her annoyed. It would be in

some sort a disgrace, though you could prove nothing, and there are always ill-natured persons who are ready to believe any scandal, however unfounded."

"O, humbug! how disinterested we are!" said Bernard, with a side glance. "If that's all, I don't think it will pay to sell out. I reckon I'll stick to my revenge."

"As you like," replied Colonel Bell, coldly.

His companion looked at him earnestly, but could make nothing of the expression of his downcast face; and they walked on in silence, a struggle going on between hatred and avarice, in which the latter proved victorious. He said, at length, stopping as they reached a turn in the path, —

"I'll come up to your place and see you about this business; and you will be ready to shell out, in case I conclude to give up my suspicions?"

"Certainly; come at any time; but meanwhile be careful what you say, for the winds carry such matters, and if you whisper it in a corner I shall hear it."

"I'll be mum as a coffin lid," replied the other, with a laugh.

"You couldn't come down *now* with a little of the yellow dust, by way of premium, could you?"

Colonel Bell drew from his pocket his purse, which was heavy with gold and silver, and poured the pieces in his outspread hand. Bernard clutched them eagerly, but seemed at the same time to be half ashamed, and,

when he had transferred them to his own pocket, murmured something about seeing the colonel in a few days, and turned abruptly away, with a hasty good by.

Colonel Bell looked after him with an expression of surprise, mingled with strong disgust. "Is it possible?" he said, half aloud, "that this vulgar wretch was once my friend, my confidant, the sole companion to whom I gave the *entrée* of the paradise where I lived with Corilla!" And then, as that name recalled the sweet and tender thoughts he had been indulging before he met Bernard, his face gradually softened, and, with downcast eyes and a meditative air, he retraced his steps to the cottage.

The old servant was waiting at the gate, for he had watched his master go towards the tomb, and was surprised to see him approach from another direction.

"Hope massa find ebery ting all right," he said, a little anxiously. "Done gone on tree year since massa here 'fore, and Hepsy and me, we'se gittin' ole."

"Every thing is right, so far as your care is concerned," replied Colonel Bell, giving him the keys. "You must try and hold on as long as you can, Martin, you and Hepsy; for it would annoy me to have any new hands about the old place," he added, with a slight sigh. "I shall have to burn it down when you go."

"Yes, massa," said Martin, cheerfully; "massa may 'pend on us. We'll hole on to de bery las' bref, an' den die kickin'."

"You shall have every thing you need to make you comfortable," continued the colonel, "and if I go away, I will leave you in the care of a competent person, who will supply your wants. Good by, now, and take care of yourselves."

"Good by, massa," replied the negro; and as his master rode away, he added, with a sorrowful shake of the head, "It's 'mazin' strange, but 'pears like massa has smoked out all he 'baccy, an' broke he pipe;" and this metaphor, which expressed more fully than any other image old Martin's idea of utter destitution and loss, portrayed the colonel's situation with a fidelity of which his simple soul could hardly conceive.

CHAPTER NINTH.

"If ladies be but young and fair,
They have the gift to know it."
* * * *
"O, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful
In the contempt and anger of her lip!"
* * * *
"How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done!"

At the same hour that Michel was left alone in the deserted village, the haughty and beautiful wife of Colonel Bell was pacing with a slow, languid step across the gorgeous carpet which covered the floor of her drawing rooms. The fading daylight came in through the lofty windows, shaded by damask and lace of the costliest texture, and all the furniture of the apartment was in a corresponding style of elegance and luxury. The house had been originally a square stone building, constructed for defence as well as for shelter, and bearing yet, in some places, the marks of battle. For in the bygone days the Indian war cry had made its inhabitants tremble behind their barricaded doors and windows; and later still, those windows had been pierced with loopholes, from whence Marion and his sharp shooters had kept at bay the mercenary troops of the ferocious Tarleton; when, for three

days, the house was a besieged fortress, and the lead of the clock weights, and the pewter dishes, and at last even the silver, had to be cast into bullets, before relief came. But it was the pride of its owners, that it had never passed into the hands of the enemy; and in the more fearful years that succeeded, one generation after another had improved the grounds around it, and added wings and outbuildings, in more ornamental styles of architecture, to relieve its massive gloom. The windows had been enlarged, and the rooms thrown together by folding doors and arches, and now the whole was furnished with all of ease, and embellishment, which wealth could procure. Rare statuary, and articles of *virtù*, were scattered around with lavish hand; pictures, that betrayed a master's touch, hung on the walls; and large mirrors, artistically arranged, multiplied all this tasteful magnificence.

Through these rooms the lady wandered; and as her eye fell on each familiar object, as she glanced in each mirror to see the reflection of her own queenly beauty, clad as she was in robes of silk, and decked with jewels, the expression of ennui that clouded her brow grew more intense, and, pausing at last with a gesture of impatience, she exclaimed, "Bah! what use is it to have all this? There is nobody in this corner of the world for whom it is worth while to make a show; the simple fools don't know enough of the value of things even to envy me.

Envy me," she added, sighing, after another pause; "they would be still greater fools if they did. I might as well be Bluebeard's wife, for any enjoyment I have. Miserable simpleton that I was to marry him! If my poor father had only taken me to England himself, instead of sending me trammelled with a husband — good heavens! to think what my beauty might have been worth to me there!"

She wrung her jewelled hands, as these broken sentences fell from her lips, and sinking into a chair that stood near, seemed for a long time lost in reveries of mingled pain and pleasure. When the thread of thought brought her back to the present hour, she found herself sitting in darkness; and rising with a yawn, she rang the bell, and having ordered lights, went up stairs to her own boudoir.

Every thing here, too, manifested artistic taste and elegance; but the mistress of this sumptuous retreat regarded it with the same weary indifference with which she had walked through the rooms below. There was no *soul* in all this wealth. It was not the gift of one loving heart to another. It was not the reckless profusion of an affection which would win the choicest gifts of earth to deck the home of its idol. It was mere ostentation, and she knew it; and, little as Clara Bell could have repaid to *love*, she would still have been abundantly gratified by such *homage*; and, though she almost hated her husband,

her craving vanity was pained in remembering, as she cast her eye over this array of riches, that all had been arranged without one reference to her wishes or her fancy.

Ten years had passed, since Clara Avenel, in the pride of her youth, and in her peerless beauty, had given her hand to Colonel Bell, and gone forth under his protection from the quiet of her country home, to achieve those triumphs among the gay and fashionable, for which she panted, and enjoy those pleasures which she thought her wealth and personal fascinations could not fail to secure.

Colonel Bell was a *blasé* man of the world, selfish, and in some measure hardened, as all such are; but he was proud of his wife, and would have loved her if she had allowed him. It needed but few months of matrimony to convince him of the mercenary motives with which she had married, and that, for any warmth of heart, or any earnestness of principle, he might as well have purchased a marble statue, and endowed it with his name. No children came to unite them by ties of common hopes and interests; and so, as time went by, they grew more and more estranged, until now they dwelt together in this luxurious home, with hearts as cold, and as immovably separated, as are the frozen regions of the extreme north and south.

Ten years! Clara Bell had been looking back over them, and found little to cheer in the retrospect. Her

father had died; her early friends were alienated. The golden apples she had thought worth the price of a life's happiness had proved themselves, too late, fruit that mocked the hunger of her soul. The grapes of Eshcol, for which she had longed, had turned to bitter ashes and dust upon her lips.

A light burned in an alabaster shade, before her toilet glass, which was upheld by two Cupids, exquisitely carved, and, pausing here, she gazed long and fixedly at the image before her; and, as she gazed, the fretful expression faded from her face, and, raising her hand, she smoothed away the slight wrinkle which her daily frowns of discontent had caused. Then with an irrepressible smile of triumph, she said, softly, "I must not *think* so much. They say too much thought makes one look old, and at thirty I cannot afford to begin to fade. I will commence reading, and see if there is really any thing in books to charm away this ennui which is devouring me. Literary ladies are the fashion nowadays, and I may as well get what good I can out of this imprisonment, which I don't mean shall last much longer."

So saying she turned away, and passing to the end of the hall, went through a long wing which extended from that side of the mansion, and descended into the library. This was a large, lofty room, built in the Gothic style, and almost entirely detached from the rest of the house. A young negro girl was placing lighted candles on the

table as she entered, and in answer to her mistress's inquiry, replied, —

"Massa say he want 'em here ebery night, whether he home or not."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Bell; and then, as her eye ran over the books in one of the alcoves, she bade the girl bring her a certain set, which occupied one of the high shelves. She brought the book ladder, and proceeded to obey; but there were several volumes indicated, and in taking them down, she accidentally let some of them drop. In her anxiety to pick them up before her mistress should see them, she sprang too hastily from the ladder, and, in so doing, knocked from the table a small writing desk of mahogany, elaborately carved, which struck a heavy oaken chair as it fell, and was so broken that its contents were scattered over the floor.

Mrs. Bell, who had been looking over some papers at a distant table, turned when she heard the noise, and saw the accident at a glance. She was in a mood to be exasperated at a trifle, or she would have cared little for the destruction of any article which belonged solely to her husband; but now she was glad of an excuse for an outburst of passion — glad of an object on which to wreak the vague anger and impatience that filled her soul. Fire seemed to flash from her blue eyes, and crossing the room with a quick step, she unfastened from her side a small cowhide which she always wore hidden beneath her skirt,

and seized with no gentle hand the terrified girl, who stood looking with helpless distress at the mischief she had caused.

"You careless hussy," exclaimed the mistress; and then came a shower of heavy blows, every one of which left livid marks on the face and the bare neck and arms of her servant; but she knew too well the penalty of the slightest resistance, and without the least effort to escape them, remained crouching at her feet, writhing with pain, but striving to stifle her sobs and groans; for this delicate lady never allowed her servants to trouble her with outcries.

At last her arm grew weary, and, as she paused to take breath, she commanded the girl to pick up the things, and restore them to their places. Wiping away her tears, she tried to obey; but it was in such nervous haste, that after she had left the room Mrs. Bell saw a small morocco case, which had fallen from the desk, lying on the floor beneath the table. She took it up and opened it, carelessly, at first, for she thought she had long ago examined every thing in that antique desk, which had stood for years in the same spot, containing mementoes of the colonel's early days, letters from his brothers and sisters, all of whom were now dead, and miniatures of his parents, painted on ivory in stiff and prim old fashions.

But this! — none of the Bell family had ever borne the face which looked up at her then; and at the first glance she started violently, a deep color flushed her

cheeks, and a wild, vague expression gleamed in her eyes. Going nearer the light she examined the case, which was old and worn, as if by much use, and then, more closely than before, the miniature it contained.

"It is herself," she murmured. For Mrs. Bell had been so much alone for the last two years, that she had contracted a habit of talking to herself when excited. "It is her face, and yet it is different. The same black hair, the same coral-red lips, the same style of beauty, and yet there is a difference — what is it?"

She remained a long time absorbed in thought, with her eyes fixed on the picture, and then her brow lighted with a sudden memory. "I have it," she exclaimed, smiling triumphantly, and then, as if overwhelmed with her own thought, she grew a little pale, and catching her breath said, in a low tone, "Good heavens, what a time there will be! and to think *I* should have found it out!" Then she returned to the desk; for she was curious to know where this secret had been kept; and in turning it round she discovered that it had a false bottom, in which a shallow drawer had opened, concealed by the carving of the wood. The spring of this drawer must have been broken by the shock of falling, for now it was pushed partly open, and could not be shut; but a paper remained within it, in which was enclosed a long ringlet of glossy black hair, and two shorter curls of flossy silk, that had evidently been cut from a child's head. Mrs. Bell touched

them daintily, with a strange, mocking smile on her face, and laid them back in their place; but the miniature she put carefully in her pocket, and taking a book returned to the drawing room.

As she passed through the hall she met one of her husband's valets, and as he bowed respectfully and stepped aside, that she might pass, she stopped and asked him when his master was expected home. Although Colonel Bell treated his wife with the most elaborate courtesy whenever they appeared together in public, in the privacy of home life their conduct to each other was marked by a studied indifference, which could not be disguised from the servants — those spies of domestic secrets. So the man stared with unaffected surprise at this question, and at the eager manner, which she could not wholly repress. He replied that the colonel, who had been absent some days, would return late that evening, and then went his way, to wonder what could have occasioned such an unwonted interest in his master's movements.

The next morning Mrs. Bell woke early, for a new excitement of feeling had broken the monotony of her life, and rendered sleep impossible. She touched the spring of a small silver bell, and before the sound had died away a maid appeared from the anteroom, where she waited.

"Open the curtains, and then call Marise. I will be dressed now," said her mistress.

"So early as this, Miss Clara?" replied the astonished servant, pausing, as she looped up the lace draperies.

"Yes. Open the shutters! — there, that's far enough. Now call Marisc, and bring the coffee."

The girl went out to obey the order, and then Mrs. Bell sprung up in bed and leaned forward, until through the window she could see the wing of the building in which the colonel's suit of rooms was situated. The shutters of his chamber were fast closed, but the window of the anteroom was open, and a servant was leaning out to chat with a pretty mulatto girl, who was gathering flowers in the garden below.

"He has returned," she murmured, "for there is that perfumed popinjay he carries about with him every where. How he can sleep with their chattering in his ears I don't see; but I believe he indulges his servants on purpose to make it more difficult for me to govern mine properly."

A step was heard approaching; she sank back on the pillows, and the maid reëntered, followed by another who carried a silver waiter containing a French roll, and coffee which sent up its fragrant steam from a precious cup of Sevres china. The girl knelt beside the bed and held the waiter, while her mistress regaled herself with its contents.

When she had withdrawn, Marise entered. She was a favorite servant, who had accompanied her mistress abroad, and been apprenticed in Paris to a hair dresser, until sho

was perfect in her art. She studied her mistress's pleasure, and had contrived to make herself so necessary to her, that Clara treated her with unusual consideration; and she, priding herself upon her position and education, refused to associate with most of the other servants, and was envied and feared by them even more than their mistress.

The process of dressing consumed some time, for Mrs. Bell, having nothing else to do, amused herself with making elaborate toilets, and was as carefully dressed for a solitary breakfast in her room as to entertain a large company of admiring guests. She had such a passion for her own beauty, she could not see it dressed otherwise than in jewels and fine raiment; and she studied every effect of color, and drapery, and position, with a patient assiduity worthy of a higher end. She even tried, at times, to control her temper, because she learned that the indulgence of strong emotion anticipated the hand of Time in making unsightly wrinkles on the face; but in this attempt she was not always successful.

After she was dressed, and breakfast had been served, she hesitated whether to wait until the dinner hour, when she usually first met her husband for the day, or to venture into the library, where he spent his mornings, while at home, in looking over and arranging various matters of business. But she was too impatient, too much excited, to defer the *éclaircissement* which was to give her such a hold on him.

For months he had compelled her to remain in that country solitude, far from the dissipation for which she had a natural craving, and which habit had made almost a necessity of her existence; and in a thousand ways he had made her feel that she was in the power of one who cared little for her anger or her tears. Now she would humble him. Now she would force him to comply with her wishes, and give her the sanction of his presence in those journeyings and gayeties for which she had longed so wearily.

Full of these thoughts she wandered through the garden, where the air was heavy with the morning perfume of a thousand flowers, and passing thence through a glass door into the library, she took a book and seated herself at the table.

She had long to wait, for Colonel Bell had reached home late at night, and his slumbers were prolonged by fatigue. When at length he sauntered into the room, he lifted his eyebrows with a negligent surprise to see it thus occupied; but although he had been absent a week, no other salutation passed between them than a cold "good morning," haughtily given and as haughtily returned. Then followed a few commonplace remarks upon the season, and the weather; the colonel secretly wondering why his wife should seek him, and she gathering her courage for what she had to say; for she, who feared nothing else in heaven or earth, feared him. He had

never been violent, rarely abrupt, but there was something in his voice and look that made her tremble; a magnetism in his eye before which her own proud glance was quelled; a hardness and sternness of character, and a quiet obstinacy of disposition, against which the foam and fury of her storms of passion dashed themselves only to fall back wasted and broken.

Now, as in walking listlessly around the room, he glanced over her shoulder at the book she was reading, his lip curled with a sarcastic smile, and he said, in a careless tone, —

"Wonders will never cease! Mrs. Bell reading, and not reading a novel! Pray, are you taking to literature, as some ladies take to devotion, on their retirement from the world?"

"I have not retired from the world," said his wife, laying down the book, and turning towards him with a defiant air.

"You have not? Ah, well! there are different degrees of retirement. *I* should call it rather lonely here."

"Lonely! yes; but I shall stay here no longer. I shall go to the springs this summer, and you can go with me or not, as you please — perhaps we shall each enjoy ourselves as well apart. A short separation will make it more delightful for us to be together during our journey in the autumn."

"Our journey where?"

"To Europe. You say you are going there in the fall, and I must go with you. I cannot stay here another winter."

There was a pause, during which they looked steadily at each other, she flushed and determined, and he with a languid surprise, as if he would not take the trouble to be curious at her excitement of manner.

At length she repeated, "I say I will not stay here longer alone."

His voice took a deeper tone, and his eye grew more commanding; but he only said, briefly, "*You will not?*"

"I will not."

"Madam, you will."

"Who shall compel me?"

"I will. We have talked enough on this subject in other times, and you know that I choose you shall stay here; it is the only place left for you, for never will I introduce you into society as my wife."

It is difficult to describe the manner in which he said this, there was in it so much quiet power, and yet it was so scornfully easy and careless; but she, trembling with rage, clinched her hand and raised it, as she cried out, in reply, "Who are you that say this? What are you, that you pretend to be ashamed of me?"

"Woman!" he exclaimed, fixing his eyes on her with a lightning glance, "will you force me to recall the past? Will you compel me to speak your shame? Remember the last winter in London! Remember your giddy dissipation, your vanity, your imprudence! Remember the

Marquis of Owersby, and your infatuation, that came so near ending in exposure and disgrace for us both. If you could have made *me* a laughing stock, you would have cared little for the rest; but my plans were laid very quietly. Nobody knew that *I* was the person who outwitted that dissolute lord, and disappointed the false wife who was willing to share his forced journey across the channel."

She shrank back in her chair, and turned very pale while he had been speaking, but she *would not* turn away her eyes; she *would not* seem to yield to the load of dishonor he was heaping upon her. A desperate courage nerved her, and she dared to brave him even yet.

"Few men besides you would have taken such things so quietly," she replied, tauntingly. "A man of spirit would have been divorced from a wife who had treated him thus."

"Do you think so?" he said, with a sardonic laugh. "Do you not see that this is the very gist and pith of my revenge? You are rich, you are beautiful, you are unscrupulous. If you were freed from the chain that binds you to me, you would soon surround yourself with pleasures, and make life a holiday. You would find friends ready to believe you had been wronged and slandered, and perhaps you might marry again, for there are enough brainless lords, who, with the reality of your beauty, and the fiction of your wealth, might be induced to marry even a *divorced wife*. I knew this, and I knew that when you had attained this end, you would care little for

the means by which you reached it; and do you suppose I would be foolish enough to allow you the chance of this triumph? *That* would have been no punishment; but *this* — to dress yourself elaborately, and have no one to admire you; to know that your youth is fleeting, and your beauty waning, and no chance remains of improving the time still left in bringing conquests to your feet; to have a house full of fine furniture, and no opportunity to display it; a wardrobe of fine dresses, which none see or envy you the possession of — this is a daily, hourly torture, which, paltry as it would seem to a woman of any mind or heart, is, to one of your character, almost too great for endurance. This solitude wearies you intolerably; this unsatisfied vanity grows ravenous, and feeds upon your most precious possession — your face. I see it, and I rejoice over it. This house is a prison, but you shall remain here while the laws of the land give a husband power to fix his wife's dwelling-place."

His face had grown almost fiendish in its expression of relentless hate and revenge, and he was going on to say more, when she, stung to madness, cried out, "Look here!" and held the miniature suddenly before him, at arm's length above her head. He knew it at a glance, and if that fair young face had been Medusa, armed with all her terrors, he could not have been petrified with a more stony amazement; he could not have grown more ghastly pale and faint, or gasped for breath more piteously.

Then came a swift reaction. "Have you been playing

the spy? Are you thief, as well as wanton?" he hissed out from his clinched teeth, with a fierce impetuosity, such as, in all their miserable life together, he had never shown before; and she sprang from her chair with a faint shriek, for at that moment he looked as if he would have murdered her.

He seized her with a grasp of steel, and placing her in her chair again, forced her to resign the miniature, though she struggled to retain it. Then, thrusting it in his bosom, he stood with one hand on her chair, and for a little while not a word was spoken between them. Both were endeavoring to regain some degree of self-control. Presently he said, in his usual calm voice, "Where did you get this picture?"

"I picked it up as it laid on the floor in this very room. One of the servants knocked your desk down by a careless movement, and as it was broken, this fell out. Now, sir, I hope you will reflect with satisfaction upon the very gentlemanly epithets you have applied to me."

He bit his lip, and turned away to see if she spoke the truth; and when he saw the condition of the desk, a flush passed over his face, and, without looking up, he asked, —

"Do you know whom the picture represents?"

"It is a miniature of your mistress, Helen Dupré."

There was a malicious triumph in her tone, as she replied, and her eyes gleamed with a keen light, for she knew those venomous words had poisoned alike his dearest memories and his fondest hopes.

He regarded her with that strange magnetic gaze before which, until now, her own had ever fallen, and said, in a slow, lingering manner, as if trying meanwhile to read in her face the full extent of her knowledge, —

"You say what you know is not true. That young girl is pure as the light of summer. Her name must not be spoken by such lips as yours. This is not her miniature."

"It looks like her," said Mrs. Bell, willing to prolong her pleasure in his perplexity.

"Not exactly; though there is a similarity that I myself noticed, and which is quite remarkable in an entire stranger. Still there is a difference. Miss Dupré has larger eyes, and her hair does not curl."

"But her mother's did!" interrupted his wife, with a loud, exulting laugh. "O, immaculate piece of perfection that you are, I have found you out; you are in my power now!"

"What do you know?" asked Colonel Bell, quietly; and his voice only grew more deep and stern.

"What do I know? Have I not heard of your early insanity for that mulatto girl? Do I not find in her miniature an exact resemblance to my neighbor's governess? Do I not find in your secret drawer hair that might have been cut yesterday from her head, and three names — Corilla! Helen! Charles! Yes, sir, you may well turn pale. Did I not hear you say that you recognized her at a glance? Do I not see your interest in her? Did I

not hear her speak of her brother? And cannot I put all these together, and conjecture what I do not know?"

"What do you conjecture?" he asked, with the same unmoved manner, in the same low, terribly calm tones.

"I conjecture that you have contrived in some way to make every body believe these children died — for so I have always heard; that you sent them to the north, and have managed to have them grow up and be educated with the belief that they were white. I *know* that you now will do almost any thing to keep the secret, and allow your neighbor to marry that base-born girl. I know that you, who are so hard-hearted, are fool enough to *love* this child of a nigger, for her mother's sake, and intend to impose her on the community as if she had a right to be received as an equal. You prate about honor! This is yours!"

"And what do you intend to do?"

"We may as well understand each other. If you will grant my wishes, and treat me as I ought to be treated, I will not interfere with your plans; I will even cultivate an acquaintance with Mrs. Hubert Warner. Perhaps some consideration is due from me towards the child of my beloved husband," she added, with a jeering laugh.

"And if I do not?" he asked, gloomily.

"Then I will thwart you, and this girl shall take her proper place as a servant," she answered, with haughty determination.

His gaze fell from her face to the floor at his feet, and he stood absorbed in thought, the purport of which his wife endeavored vainly to read in the rigid lines of his stern countenance. Then he said, slowly, "I shall ask no promises from you, for I learned, long since, that your promises are but empty breath. I shall think of what you have said, and if I consider it best to yield to you in some degree, I shall do so. But this I do say, and you will do well to heed me. Clara Bell," and here he spoke louder and quicker, going close to her, and looking straight into her eyes, "if that young girl suffers in act or thought through any word of yours, I will shut you up in a prison, from whence it will not be as easy to escape as from this."

His wife shrank away from him, terrified at his savage words and manner; but still her beautiful lip curled with an incredulous smile, and she said, faintly, —

"What do you mean? There are no Bastiles in this country, in which to shut up refractory wives."

"There are other places, though. There are pleasant little retreats where women are sometimes sent, when they haven't sense enough to know how to behave. Some people call them *madhouses*."

"You cannot! You dare not!" she cried, starting away from him in horror.

"Tempt me, and see if I dare not! Try me, and see if I cannot!" And with these words he left the room.

CHAPTER TENTH.

> "In glowing health, with boundless wealth,
> Yet sickening of a vague disease,
> You know so ill to deal with time,
> You needs must play such pranks as these."

When Clara Bell sought her husband in the library, her thoughts had been fixed solely upon advancing her own wishes by means of the new ascendency she imagined herself to have acquired over one whom she feared almost as much as she hated. She had determined to restrain her temper, to be quiet and persuasive, and obtain from him a promise that, if she would not interfere with his plans, he would take her back to the gay European life she had enjoyed so much.

But as usual, he had angered and outwitted her, reviled and taunted her, mocked at her power and dared her to use it; and now her whole frame throbbed and trembled with an uncontrollable rage, and the most intense desire to revenge herself. Yet how? Wary even in the midst of her wild passion, she racked her brain for means by which to thwart his cherished scheme, without compromising the faint hopes of his compliance which she still held, or provoking the anger which she dreaded. It would have

been wiser in him to have promised the indulgence she craved; but having already denied it, his pride refused submission to her attempted coercion. When a man's foes "are they of his own household," it is hard for him to conduct the battle with coolness and skill.

But the mockery, the mask of life, must be kept up; for, severed in every other feeling, they were united in the pride that shrank from exposing their domestic unhappiness to the gossiping curiosity of society; and guests had been invited to dine with them. Clara had forgotten it until reminded by her maid that it was time to dress for dinner; and then, though the servants had shrunk all the morning from her flashing eyes and her loud voice, she dressed her face with smiles, and toned her words to their softest cadence; and robed with royal magnificence, she descended to play the hostess to some dozen gentlemen, who went away envying Colonel Bell, and, in the fulness of after-dinner satisfaction, praising equally his cook and his wife.

The colonel had accompanied his guests to their carriages, and after they drove away he returned to the drawing room, hoping to find Clara; for prudence whispered it would be well for him to pretend to more friendliness, for a little while at least, in order to be secure from her machinations until he had settled matters with Bernard.

She was standing before one of the mirrors, — but the hard and bitter expression of her face told that, for once, she stood thus without thinking of her own beauty, —

when she saw behind her the reflection of her husband advancing, with a scornful smile on his lips at the position in which he found her. She turned quickly, and drew herself up with a defiant air; but he came nearer, and carelessly holding out to her a flower which he had plucked as he came along, made some remark upon its delightful perfume.

Without deigning any reply she struck at it with a swift motion of her delicate little hand, and the broken stem fell to the floor.

"Is it thus you treat it?" said Colonel Bell, in a low voice. "I meant it for a peace offering."

She looked down upon it, and her lip curled proudly as she answered, "Yes, truly, it is a fitting peace offering! Do you know the language of that flower?"

"No. I am not versed in that nonsense," said the colonel, in surprise at the question.

"It means '*concealed hatred*'—truly, a fitting peace offering to pass from you to me!"

As she spoke she stooped to pick up the flower, and then, crushing it with a strong grasp, she threw it at him, and passed out of the room. He caught it as it fell, and holding the crumpled petals in his open hand, regarded them silently with a face that grew every moment sterner and paler, and then laid them carefully within the leaves of his pocket book. "Concealed hatred, I accept the omen," he murmured aloud; and, with a sigh, he turned away, and sauntered forth into the garden.

Clara, seated at the window of her boudoir, looked after him with a scowling brow. Ah, what availed to that miserable pair all the wealth and beauty around them, or the delicious air of that summer day, golden with sunshine, and filled with bird music, and redolent with perfume of the countless flowers in that garden where no "heart's-ease" grew? The chain that bound them together was galling them almost to madness; and Clara felt its weight most heavily at this moment, because she reflected, that in her passion she had rejected the first slight overture of reconciliation; and knowing his stubborn pride, she doubted if it would ever be renewed. No real peace or harmony could ever be between them; but for that she cared little, if the hollow semblance could but release her from the solitude of the splendid mansion, where he had for two years kept her an unwilling prisoner.

As she watched him, with her cheek leaning wearily on her hand, "chewing the cud of fancies" that had no sweetness mingled with their bitter, she noticed a person approach and accost him; and then a very earnest conversation occurred as they paced slowly up and down the sandy walk.

She was wondering with an idle curiosity who the stranger could be, when the little maid that stood fanning her said, suddenly, "Dat ar am de bery man came here t'oder day see massa."

"O, no, child; that was a very common person: this gentleman is well dressed."

"He done bought he clothes since, den, for I members him bery well, he so bery anxious see massa."

Mrs. Bell made no reply. She remembered the man referred to; for happening to be on the terrace she had heard him inquire for the colonel, but she did not notice him as closely, or remember him as well, as the child did, and would have given the subject no further thought, had not Marise, who entered soon after, remarked carelessly, as, standing by the window, she noticed the direction in which her mistress's eyes were gazing, —

"That gentleman and the colonel are having a mighty long talk."

"I see they are; I wonder what it is all about," replied Mrs. Bell, languidly.

"I was on the piazza," replied the maid, "and they seemed so much excited that I really felt some curiosity, and so I *happened* to remember that I left my handkerchief in the arbor, down at the bottom of the walk, and so I was obliged to pass them."

She paused. Her mistress made no reply and manifested no interest, but she knew she was held as a sort of spy on her master's actions, and therefore went on.

"You know, Miss Clara, I never listens. I scorn it. But then sometimes a body can't help hearing; and as I passed the first time, they was talking about money, and omen, ... came back they was talking about some woman. away, and sa

I can't be positive about it; but I suspect that I heard the name, and if I did it was Millar, or Rillar, or some such."

"Rillar! was it Corilla?" exclaimed Mrs. Bell, starting from her languid attitude, her listlessness all gone, and her manner so eager and excited, that Marise opened her eyes in astonishment at this change from the affected indifference with which her communications were generally received.

"Perhaps it was," she answered; "they noticed me, and so I had to hurry by."

Mrs. Bell bit her lip till the blood left it, and clasped her hands in sudden impatience, while she cast a more searching glance than before at the two, who, still in earnest conversation, walked up and down between the flat, broad-spreading garden beds, that afforded no chance of eavesdroppings. O, if she could hear what they were saying! If some fairy gift would only make her invisible till she had learned that secret! At length Colonel Bell and his companion went into the library together, and then Clara rose suddenly and left the room. She had not spoken since the last exclamation of surprise, and now the maid and the child looked at each other with wondering eyes, and the former, stepping to the door, opened it gently and peeped out. "I thought so," she said, and turned back with a smile.

"'Pears like somepin done come over miss," said the child; "dis mornin de want no sich ting as pleasing

her, and now she don't mind ef I hain't fanned her more'n half de time."

"How you do murder words!" said Marise, giving herself a grand air, *à la Madame Bell.* "Why don't you learn to speak correct, child? Your mistress is absorbed."

"I dono whether she's 'sorbed or not, but she mighty curus dese two days. 'Pears like she crazy," replied the child, subdued by her companion's manner, and yet clinging to her freedom of thought.

It has been said that the library was nearly detached from the house, touching it only at the extremity of one of the wings, where a door opened at the foot of stairs that led from Colonel Bell's apartments. Into this part of the building Clara rarely went when he was at home; but now she trod with light, swift steps along the narrow entry, and down the stairs, beneath which a small closet had been constructed, where fishing and hunting implements were kept.

Into this nook she crowded herself, and shutting the door as nearly as she could, was secure from observation; for it was quite dark in the passages. Then cautiously removing some rubbish, that with apparent carelessness was piled in one corner of the shelf, she revealed a small aperture through which one might look into the library.

Alternately applying her eye and ear, she looked and listened; but still her burning curiosity was but partially satisfied; for, instead of being in his usual place by the table, at the end of the room, near her hiding-place, the

colonel was standing before the secretary, in an opposite corner, and his companion, with his hands in his pockets, walked about, looking at the books, and occasionally making some remark about them.

Once he came so near her, and remained so long gazing in that direction, she thought he must have discovered the hole through which she was peeping; but he passed on without remark, and she breathed more freely again.

At length, however, Colonel Bell closed his secretary, and, coming towards the table, beckoned his companion to sit near him. But few words passed between them after this. The stranger seemed to be in high spirits, and once or twice attempted a joke; but the colonel was grave and taciturn, and in silence counted a pile of bills, which he afterwards gave to the other, who counted them in his turn, and transferred them to his porte-monnaie. Then pushing back his chair, he said, as he arose, —

"Well, now this matter may be considered as settled, and your pretty Helen may sleep in peace — so long as the cash lasts."

"Bernard, I depend upon your honor as a gentleman," replied the colonel, gravely, and with a slight uneasiness of manner.

"Some folks would say it was rather poor dependence," said the stranger, snapping his fingers carelessly. "I've been in some queer places since you knew me, colonel; places where it would have been rather a tight squeeze to

carry much of a load of honor. However, I know which side of the hoe cake the 'lasses is on, and I'll be fair with you. You say you are going to Charleston to-morrow."

"Yes, I shall be gone a few days. You go to Columbia, I believe."

"Yes, I'm going up there a while, and when I come back, may be I'll call in and dine with you some day. I want to see your wife. They say she's devilish handsome."

"Devilish handsome! She's all that," replied Colonel Bell, with an irrepressible emphasis on the adjective, which did not escape the quick ear of his companion; and as they stood in the waning light from the high window, Clara saw him turn with a half whistle and a side glance, saying, —

"Ah! termagant, is she? Wears the breeches? Makes the colonel stand round?"

"*No.* I am master in my own house, and always intend to be," was the stern, emphatic answer which reached Clara's ear, as they moved towards the door.

She waited to see no more, but leaving her hiding-place, rushed breathlessly to the boudoir, where Marise was waiting her return; having sent away the child, that there might be no spy upon her mistress's motions, save herself. Yet though she expected something unusual, she was unprepared for the vehemence with which Mrs. Bell seized her hand, and drew her towards the hall, exclaiming, in a suppressed tone, —

"Run! fly! follow that stranger, and find out where he lives."

"Me, Miss Clara! How can I? He don't live in these parts, I reckon," said Marise, hesitating, and half trembling before the wild light in the eyes fixed on her.

"Overtake him, then," she answered, hurriedly; "go, quick; lose no time, then; for, though he walked here, he may have left a horse somewhere near."

"I *can't*, miss; it's dark now; I can't go in the dark, alone."

"You *must*," replied her mistress, stamping her foot, and pushing the girl forward. "If you overtake him, I will give you that satin dress you wanted. Here he goes, now. Follow him, that's a good girl, and I will pay you well for it."

Marise looked out the window, and seeing the stranger disappear through the garden gate, she said, in a mollified tone, "If I can come up with him, I will. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him to come here to-morrow afternoon. Say that I must see him before he goes to Columbia. Fly, child, or you will lose him in the darkness of the wood." But before she had finished speaking, the prompt, quick-witted servant glided from the room, and a moment after, Mrs. Bell saw her flitting through the shadows of the hedgerow, in the direction Bernard had taken.

It was an hour before she returned; for she, divining some mystery, had taken the precaution to follow until

she was sure her own steps could not be traced by any one from her master's side of the house, before she accosted her unconscious companion, who was quite startled at her sudden appearance, and not a little surprised at the message she brought.

Colonel Bell and his wife did not again meet until the next morning, when he joined her in the drawing room, where she was trying to amuse herself with the piano. Her faultless hands and arms showed well in such a position, and therefore she liked to keep herself in practice. Each was coldly polite to the other, and a few remarks passed between them, in quiet tones. No allusion was made to the occurrences of the previous day. The storm was over for this time, and the colonel was so unusually gracious that he even told her of his intended trip to Charleston, and begged to know if she had any commands; and when the carriage was announced, to take him to the railway station, he bade her a courteous farewell, and hoped she would enjoy herself till his return, in tones which tried not to sound sarcastic. She smiled calmly in reply. But O, what a world of bitterness was in her heart! She counted the hours, the minutes of that weary day, and was beginning to fear the stranger would not come at her call, when the servant announced Mr. Bernard, and he entered. The business for which she desired to see him was one requiring some diplomacy; but Clara possessed the advantage of being herself perfectly unscrupulous, and of knowing that her companion had

been once bribed; and a few minutes' study of his face convinced her the operation might be repeated with entire safety.

Bernard was indeed much changed since the time when, in the heyday of youthful pleasure, he had been the boon comrade of Colonel Bell; but it was the legitimate change from a frolicsome, unprincipled youth, to a coarse and dissipated manhood. *Then* there was little apparent difference between them, except that one would have said William Bell was of a finer and more sensitive organization than his chosen friend; and it may be that he was only saved from a similar ruin by the one deep grief which, for a time, broke off his intimacy with the jolly fellows of his set, and the influence exercised in that dark hour by the piety and forgiving love of his neglected wife. After her death, he went abroad, and thus his early acquaintances were in a measure forgotten; and, though his after life was far from being blameless, he had never resumed the tendency towards low dissipation in which Bernard had squandered his fortune, and lost respectability and friends. The latter would probably have been a hard and rough man, even had he tried to pursue the paths of honor and virtue; and the depth to which his original nature had become callous, may be known from the fact that for some months past he had been the keeper of a pack of bloodhounds, with which he hunted runaway negroes, enjoying the business as much as the savage

beasts whose unerring scent he followed. Human nature can descend to no lower degree of depravity.

Too brutal to be in any wise able to understand the nature of the love his early friend had entertained so long, he regarded Colonel Bell's affection for Corilla's child as a wayward freak, similar to those which, in old times, used to furnish food for many a good-natured jest; and as the laugh which he bestowed on this was somewhat more sardonic, he had very little faith that it would prove a persistent humor, and had accepted his offer of money, repeating to himself the old proverb, "Make hay while the sun shines." Added to this was his hatred of Hubert Warner, and an habitual recklessness, which hard drinking had not tended to diminish, and a shallowness of brain which made it easy for a skilful tongue to confuse his ideas; so that it was no wonder if Clara Bell found in this man a tool ready fitted for her hand.

Still he hesitated long between the present advantage of the bribe she offered, and the hope of more prolonged benefit from his power over Colonel Bell; and his curiosity was aroused to know why the wife was so full of eagerness to further that which the husband was as eager to avoid.

To the latter inquiry she gave slight answer, but upon the former she exerted all the force of art. She had, by a few questions, drawn from him the outlines of Corilla's history; and now she pretended to coincide with the suggestion which he unwarily hazarded, that Colonel Bell

was always full of whims, and that this would probably pass away as others had done. "At any rate," she added, "you cannot suppose he would be willing to advance money many times; it is easy enough to promise, but it is easier to change one's mind, when the promise draws on the purse strings."

"I don't know about that; a man will bleed pretty freely when his temper is up," replied Bernard.

"A man so calm and cool as the colonel don't often let his temper hurt his interest," Clara said, sarcastically.

"That may be; but when he has once shut my mouth, it will be for his interest to keep it shut," he answered.

"You are mistaken there. He has deceived you," replied the lady. "Next fall we are going to Europe, to remain several years; and of what consequence will the opinion of our neighbors be to us then? What shall we care for their gossip? And as for Mr. Hubert Warner, he has lived principally in Cuba for five years, and when he is married, will take his bride there, and then they will be quite out of the reach of any thing you may say or do. What hold will you have then on Colonel Bell? and how can you be so foolish as to believe that he will think it necessary to repay your silence with money?"

"If that is true, I *shall* be left out in the cold, and, in six months from this, if I should want to remind him of this neat little bargain of ours, he can afford to let me go to the dogs. I know him of old. A fellow might as well try to whistle up hill at a mark, as to expect to

get any thing out of him, when he takes a notion against it; and I don't think he likes my meddling in his affairs very well."

"You may make sure he doesn't," replied Clara. "Did he say any thing to you about going to Europe?"

"Hang it! no, not a word. Zounds! if he has been humbugging me, he'll find I'll have a slice of that private pudding of his yet, I reckon."

"Don't your own common sense tell you that it is as I say?" returned Mrs. Bell. "If by any means he can keep this matter secret a few months longer, there will afterwards be no danger of having it divulged. It will only occasion a little gossip, at which the happy pair can afford to laugh, and which Colonel Bell will not even hear of, unless you very kindly take the trouble to inform him. He will doubtless be much obliged to you for the information, but I suspect he won't pay you a great deal for it."

"Hang it!" said Bernard, coarsely, "you needn't laugh at a fellow. How much better will you do for me? I reckon you'll want me to chew your secret in t'other side of my mouth, won't you?"

All the pride of Clara's soul revolted against the air of vulgar familiarity with which this was uttered, and with a hauteur that was intended to abash him, she answered, —

"Of course this business is private, and it will be for your interest as much as mine that Colonel Bell should not know who instigated you to the deed, and showed you how he has been imposing upon you. But I do not

care so very much about it. If you choose to rely upon him, you may do so, and find yourself disappointed. These jewels I offer you are worth far more than you will ever get from him."

As she spoke, she opened a morocco case, from the velvet lining of which a set of diamond ornaments flashed out brightly. Bernard's eyes glistened, as he held out his hand for them; but she retained them, saying, "Not now; there must be something done to earn them, before I give them up."

"How much might they be worth, now? How do I know they are not all sham?"

"Sham! Do you think *I* would wear paste?" exclaimed Mrs. Bell, with an indignation which convinced him that her jewels were what they seemed.

"They can't be worth less than twenty thousand dollars!" he exclaimed; "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush, and I'll be hung if I don't think I'm a fool if I don't trade with you. Let me look at them a minute."

Reluctantly she surrendered them, half repenting her offer when she thought of their value, yet half glad to be rid of ornaments which had been presented to her under such circumstances that she never dared wear them, and the very sight of them tinged her cheek with a blush of shame.

Bernard held them to the light, and their prismatic sparkle soon conquered his lingering reluctance. He

replaced them in her outstretched hand, and, with the oath that always *would* come when he was very much in earnest, said, —

"It's a bargain. Now tell me what you want done."

"Get a warrant, and have that girl Helen arrested as a free person of color coming into this state from the north. You can do it legally; and she will be compelled to go to jail. When you have done this, come to me for your reward."

She spoke hurriedly, with suppressed breath, and a look of fierce determination. The hardened wretch beside her looked in her pale face with a sort of savage admiration, and replied, —

"Hang it! you are a trump! That just jumps with my inclinations, and I'll do it, I vow I will;" and he went on to tell her the abuse he had received from Hubert Warner, and the venomous desire for revenge, which he had stifled when his interests seemed to require it, but which now blazed forth with renewed fire. Their business was soon finished; for this siren, who had lured better men to forget honor and truth, found little difficulty in drawing Bernard along, until he scarcely knew whether it was her will or his own which prompted him. He left her, promising to bring from Columbia, whither he was going immediately, the warrant which would complete her husband's vexation, and overwhelm the unfortunate Helen with distress and infamy.

She stood a long time absorbed in thought in the

centre of the room where he had left her, a keen, cold glitter in her eyes, her small hand clinching the jewel case, and every line of her face set in bold and rigid determination. An approaching footstep aroused her, and, starting, she turned away, saying, half aloud, "If I fail, I can scarcely be in a worse condition than now; and if I succeed,"—she drew in her breath through her shut teeth, and her nostrils dilated,—"I shall be amply revenged on the man I hate."

CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

"—— But God above,
Deal between me and thee. * * * * *
They have tied me to the stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course.
There is worse death than dying — that is mine,
If now I kill thee not."

The evening after their return home, Helen and Hubert had much discussion respecting Michel, and the best means of taking care of him. At first, they thought they could depend upon John; but when he was cautiously sounded the next day, he utterly refused to go to Granby alone in the night, or even by day, saying that nothing could tempt him to run the risk of seeing the sights and hearing the sounds which had frightened some of his acquaintance nearly out of their senses. Perhaps he did not suspect the errand on which they wished to send him, and perhaps the slight sympathy which the family had apparently accorded to his own trials had so soured the milk of human kindness in his nature, that the coagulated liquid could no longer flow for the relief of his fellow-men.

There was no resource left but to inform Kissy; and knowing the superstitions which she shared in common

with the other negroes, Hubert had expressed a doubt if she would be willing to remain there with her husband, even if some way were devised by which she could be allowed to do so. He wronged her womanly heart. Her lips indeed turned white, and her soft eyes dilated with fear; but without any hesitation she begged to be sent to nurse him, and, when Helen asked if she was not afraid, she said, simply, "I ain't scare nothin' so much as havin' Michel dare alone."

But some management was required before she could be sent to him. The distance was too great for her to go and return during the hours of darkness, and consequently her absence would be known to her mistress; and no one could expect the owners of such property to look with help or favor upon the escape of a slave. Still something must be done, and Helen, with considerable care, broached the subject as she sat in private conference with Mrs. Warner, and having interested her in Michel's trials, and in Kissy's sorrows, at length ventured to reveal the dilemma in which she was placed.

Mrs. Warner owned that she could not blame Michel, who had been sadly ill treated by the brutal master to whom Mrs. Bell had hired him, and she dwelt with peculiar satisfaction upon the fact that Kissy did not run away with him, although she might have done so; arguing with a strange but not uncommon self-delusion, that it was affection for her which had kept her servant from wandering.

"Kissy is a good girl," she said, "and I believe really

is grateful for all I have done for her; and after John's actions I hardly expected that from any of them. But, Helen, my dear, you see it is impossible for me to allow her to go to her husband. It could not be done without some of the servants getting knowledge of it; and the name of the thing would destroy all one's authority over them. Mr. Warner would never consent to it."

"He needn't know any thing about it," Helen answered.

"He must, for he writes all the passes; and he will miss her, and inquire where she is gone."

"Couldn't you get him to write a pass for her to go somewhere else, and then let her go there. I declare, that is quite a good idea," continued Helen, her face brightening. "It will relieve you of all perplexity, for even you need not seem to know any thing of the real state of the case. Kissy must think of some relations she wants to visit, and come to you for permission. You can consent, and ask Mr. Warner for a pass for her, and then I can arrange the rest."

"A fine lesson in deception you will teach my servants," Mrs. Warner replied, with a smile; but she finally agreed to this plan, and Helen retired to talk with Kissy. Fortunately she had some relatives in Columbia whom she had visited once before; and having been duly impressed with the idea that she was on no account to betray to her mistress her real destination, she was sent to beg the requisite permission.

With apparent reluctance Mrs. Warner consented to

her absence for a week, which she must be sure not to exceed, and gave her a few written words, with which she went to her master's office for a pass.

She returned to Helen with the precious document, too full of joy to be able to express her gratitude otherwise than by tears and prayers; and the next morning, before the earliest stars had set, she stole from her room when all the rest were sleeping, laden with provisions which Helen had managed to secrete there during the previous day.

When he found she had gone, Hubert laughed at his mother and Helen for their jesuitical proceedings, and declared he should always be on his guard against them, after having discovered such a genius for deception. But Helen defended herself on the principle of choosing the least of two evils, and retorted by inquiring how he could defend and uphold a system which required the exercise of so much artifice, before humane persons could enable a wife to go to the aid of a sick husband.

His defence was rather lame, and hardly quieted the secret reproaches of her conscience for the countenance she too was giving to the system, by marrying a slaveholder; but he ended the discussion by bidding her beware how she uttered seditious language — he could have the vigilance committee order her to leave town, and then she would be compelled to go to Cuba *with him*.

Kissy found her way without difficulty to the lonely house where her husband lay, feverish and groaning with

pain and thirst, for there was no water nearer than the river, and he had not wet his lips since the morning of the day on which the accident occurred which disabled him from walking.

Braving the danger of discovery in being seen by any chance traveller, the devoted wife took the pail in which she had brought her provisions, and went to the river for water, with which she happily returned without meeting any one. The refreshing draught was like nectar to the parched lips of the sufferer, and wet bandages constantly applied to his bruised and swollen limb reduced the inflammation so much that in a day or two the tormenting pain had nearly subsided, and he was able to hobble about the rooms by the help of a crutch, which he contrived to make from a piece of the fence which Kissy brought him.

It was necessary to keep carefully concealed in the daytime, for though the vicinity was without inhabitants, the county road ran through it, and travellers often passed that way. The miserable clay eaters plodded to market with their scanty bundles of fagots, behind shadowy caricatures of horses, or skeleton mules, so starved and weak that they seemed to be leaning for support against the thills, rather than exerting any force to draw the slight dray on which the load was placed. From such creatures there was nothing to fear. They were too stupid to think, and too superstitious to dare, any invasion of the haunted premises.

But pleasure parties sometimes drove by, waking the echoes with their mirth, and stopping to gather bouquets

from the flowers which still flourished "where once a garden smiled;" and others, less familiar with the place, cast curious glances at the closed windows, and sometimes peeped into the silent dwellings.

But at evening and early morning the fugitive and his wife could venture forth securely; and when a little experience had abated their fears of visitors from the unseen world, they grew cheerful and happy, and again and again blessed the kind young hearts that had provided for them this asylum.

Several days had passed thus, when, as they sat together at the window of an upper room late one evening, they saw a carriage approach and stop at their gate; and through the starlight gloom Kissy recognized "Mass' Hubert," as he descended from it and entered the house. She lighted a candle — for they had not dared to keep one burning — and went down to show him the way up stairs.

He was standing at the hall door which he had pushed half open, and was about to call her, when he saw the gleam of the candle dimly lighting her dusky face, as she shaded it with her hand from the draft of air, and he smiled to think that she looked as weird and gnome-like as any of the inhabitants with which fancy had invested the place.

"Hillo, Kissy! how d'ye? The ghosts haven't carried you off yet I see," he said, as he came near.

"O, Mass' Hubert, bless you, dey ain't no sich — least ways, dey ain't none here," she answered, with a boldness

that surprised him. "How be Miss Helen and de rest?" she continued; "I hopes you brings good news, massa. Michel says, 'pears like he ought to be gettin' 'long, 'fore long."

"He is better then, is he?"

"O laus! yes, Mass' Hubert—heap better — most well, on'y he can't walk 'thout a crutch. Come up and see him — take care de broken step, Massa."

She led the way up stairs, and Hubert followed, to receive from the grateful negro a welcome so garrulous and warm that he was fain to check it, by entering upon some explanation of the arrangements he had made for Michel's further escape.

The light of the candle, shining out the window, caught the eye of a traveller, who at that unwonted hour was coming alone and on horseback from the city of Columbia, not far distant. It was Bernard, who, after several days of wild dissipation, had now set out on his return home; bringing with him the papers which Mrs. Bell had commissioned him to obtain. He checked the rapid pace with which his horse was bearing him along the silent street that gave back no sound to the footfall, and looked again. Yes, he certainly saw it; a dim but steady light, shining out into the darkness which shrouded the fields and houses, and for a minute his heart throbbed quickly, and with a sudden impulse of fear he shut his eyes and urged his horse forward in another direction. But second thought arrested his headlong career; and, pausing, he

looked back, and at length turned his horse and guided him slowly towards the light.

"I've heard all sorts o'stories about this place," he muttered to himself, "and sometimes I've thought I saw lights 'round the houses, but it was most always the moon shining on some pane o'glass, or something o'that kind,— but there ain't any moon to-night, and there's certainly the steadiest light I ever saw, and I should like to know if there really is such goings on here as the niggers tell for. Hang it!" he exclaimed, in a whisper, as coming nearer he saw the horse and low buggy standing at the road side, not far from the house. "Hang it! if I ever knew before that ghosts came up from the other world with a real horse and carriage. I always thought they were like cherubs, all head and shoulders, with white sheets, perhaps, but no particular conveniences for sitting down; much less for driving horses. These must be newfashioned kind o'fellers, and hang me if I don't take a peep at 'em."

So saying he dismounted, and leading his horse into the field where the shadow of an outbuilding secured him from observation, he crept cautiously along till he reached the back door, which was directly under the window from which the light still gleamed, and which, the hinge being broken, stood always partly open.

Listening here, he heard the faint sound of voices, and beginning to believe that they proceeded from mortal and not spiritual beings, he silently ascended, till he could see the

rai the half-open chamber door, and distinguish hree shadows, which were certainly cast by substantial as flesh and blood. Chuckling at his discovery, he slipped off his shoes, and crept on tiptoe along the entry and behind the door, where he could hear all that was said, and through the crack get a glimpse of the persons present.

Kissy was just gathering her things together, in preparation for departure, and Hubert was giving some last directions.

"'Pears like I'll be powerful lonesome here to-night arter you go," said Michel. "Couldn't Kissy stay till mornin'?"

"I could walk home, you know," Kissy added, looking up at him, as she paused, with her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"No, you had better come with me now. Michel must leave here early in order to get to the depot in season. You understand, Michel," Hubert repeated, "just how you are situated; for, if questioned, I don't want you to say any thing that I can't verify. I went to see Colonel Bell about you, but he was not at home; and I have written to your late owner, offering to buy you running, since that scoundrel who was after you suspected me of concealing you. I have received no answer, but as he will doubtless accept my offer, I have no hesitation in saying that you belong to me, and in taking you with me to Cuba. You know what time the train comes along

to-morrow morning, and you had better plan your walk so as not to wait there long. You have been advertised; so the less attention you attract, the better; but if any one should recognize and arrest you before I get there, you can show the paper I have given you, and insist upon being kept there till I come. They won't think of disputing my word, of course; so you will be perfectly safe; only be sure to let nothing hinder you from being on the spot at the moment, for the cars wait for nobody. I wish there was some way for you to ride; but that can't be done without letting some one else into the secret, which would not be advisable."

"O, neber mind 'bout dat, massa. I can walk on de scrutch bery well dat far; de Lord bless you for all de goodness you'se showed a poor 'flicted nigger. One dese days, massa, when I gets well, you'll see you won't be sorry," he added, drawing his form to its utmost height, and inflating his chest as if to express the swelling emotions that filled his heart.

"Well, I don't know as I object to the Lord's blessing, and you must try to do as well as you can," said Hubert, trying to speak carelessly, to hide his own feelings, which were much affected. "Come, now," he added, "it is time to be off. I will give you just two minutes to say good by, and then Kissy must come with me."

He walked into the entry, and waited till Kissy came out. For a little while, he stood so close to his mortal

enemy, that it was only by a strong effort the latter suppressed his desire to stab him to the heart. Nothing but the hope that he was reserved for greater suffering, and more exquisite revenge, saved the life of Hubert at that unguarded moment.

Presently Kissy came, wiping away her tears, and followed by Michel, who hobbled along to hold the candle for them.

"Be sure you put the light in that corner, where nobody can't see it out doors," said Kissy, looking back to where he stood at the head of the stairs.

"That is a wise precaution," added Hubert; "for the night is dark, and a light shows a good way. Take care of yourself, boy, and be sure and meet me at the depot."

"Yes, massa; by t'ee, Kissy; you'll har great tings ob me, one dese yer days," Michel cried, cheerfully, and turned back to his solitary room.

They had shut the door in going out, and the perfect silence that succeeded had in it something appalling. He had placed the light in a shaded corner, where its dim rays hardly lit the intense darkness of the lonely place, but yet caused flickering, tremulous shadows, that seemed instinct with life. He placed himself near the window, as if in the touch of the outer air was some communication from his fellows; but the darkness and loneliness oppressed him even more than before; he grew nervous and excited, and could not help fancying he heard the sound of suppressed breathing, and felt a consciousness

of some one near. Unable to endure his terror, he determined to go down into the garden, where he had slept the first night that he came to this place, and, taking the light, had nearly reached the stairs, when he stumbled over the shoes which Bernard had left behind him. Putting down the lamp to examine them, Michel uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"De Lord preserve us. Somebody done been here dis night 'sides us; and now may be ebery ting is lost, and Mass Hubert got heself into strouble."

"That he will, you rascal, and you, too," said a voice, while a strong grasp seized his coat.

Michel's heart stood still with mortal fear, and he recoiled and shrank together like one stricken with palsy, weak and trembling in every limb. He had not heard Bernard following him, and for a moment he thought Satan, whose domain he half believed himself to have invaded, had suddenly appeared to claim his victim. But when his captor, shaking him roughly, bade him get up, and threatened alternately to have him whipped to death the moment he got him to his master, and to cut his throat if he did not quietly consent to accompany him there, the negro began to recognize the satanic humanity into whose hands he had fallen; and as he recovered his scattered senses, and gradually rose to his feet, desperation took the place of fear.

Since his first exclamation, he had not replied a word to all the brutal tirade poured out upon him, or made any

resistance to the kicks and cuffs which had been so freely administered; but now, as he stood face to face with his captor, what thoughts swept through his brain! what visions of the happiness that had seemed so near, only to make his disappointment more profound and hopeless! The dim light shone over his companion's face, but his own was in shadow; else perhaps Bernard would not so recklessly have left him free. The latter was armed only with a bowie knife, which he had drawn and held to Michel's throat in the first moment of the seizure; but his craven fear was so obvious, and his submission seemed so entire, that, no longer apprehending danger or resistance, he now stood carelessly holding it in his hand, and looking about him, said, talking to himself, —

"Ain't there a rope in all this cursed hole? I must have something or other to tie your hands with. How I'm going to get you away from here I don't know. It will take you all night to hobble on that lame foot. Hang it, if I don't mean to tie you up, so you can't crawl into any hole to hide, and leave you here till morning; I could if I had a rope; ain't there any about here? Tell me quick, if you don't want your throat cut."

He held the knife up with a threatening gesture, but held it still carelessly, expecting the mere sight of it to intimidate his crippled and unarmed captive.

But with a sudden blow of his crutch Michel struck the knife from his hand, and sprang upon him. It went

whizzing far out of reach, and the next instant they closed in deadly conflict.

Bernard was the taller and larger man, but Michel's muscles had been strengthened and hardened by a life of toil, so that he was a match for his antagonist. Not a word was spoken; only their hard breathings broke the silence, as they grappled, and strained, and panted. Both knew that the struggle was desperate; one fought for life, and one for more, far more than life, and every nerve was tense, and every sinew strong as steel.

For a long time the issue of the combat was doubtful; but at length Bernard stepped with his whole weight upon Michel's wounded foot, and the exquisite pain causing him to relax his hold an instant, Bernard was able to get his hand under the handkerchief that was tied loosely round his neck, and twist it to choking tightness. In vain he struggled; the grasp was like that of a vice. He felt himself growing weak, gasping, suffocating; his head reeling, the blood surging to his brain; when, in that moment of nature's agony, his hand, falling powerlessly, grasped at his coat, and pricked itself against the point of the rude knife which he wore there, concealed in a private pocket. It was strange he had not thought of it before; it was stranger still that at this moment of benumbing torpor, this lightning thought should flash across his mind, nerving his dying hand to one more effort. He seized the knife, made one quick thrust, guided by his dim and glazing eye, and then fell helplessly to the floor.

A faint shriek reached his dull ear; he felt some one fall beside him, and the strangling pressure on his throat relaxed. The light was extinguished, and it was many moments before he could so far recover the life which had nearly fled as to be able to raise himself upon his elbow and listen. There was no sound; the air was hushed, the darkness intense; of all the world, he seemed to himself at that instant the only living thing. Where, then, was his enemy?

He reached forth his hand, and it touched a face of clay, warm, indeed, and slippery with blood, but motionless. He laid it on the breast, and knew that the heart had ceased to beat.

A cold sweat covered him; a trembling and horror seized him; it was the recoil of nature from blood, from murder, even though it be involuntary, and in self-defence. To be thus alone, in darkness, with the corpse of the man he had killed — O, horrible! He raised himself, and, in doing so, his hand fell on his crutch; and, grasping it, he groped his way hurriedly down the stairs, and out the back door into the garden. But once safe under the kindly starlight, breathed upon by the free air, other thoughts came to him; and, remembering the awful peril he had escaped, and the good he had secured, now beaming more brightly than ever before his mental eye, a stern sense of triumph entered his soul, a vengeful joy that nerved and thrilled him.

He returned to the house, and, having found the candle,

succeeded after some effort in lighting it, with matches which fortunately he happened to have in his pocket. It had been lying in a pool of blood, and the wick sputtered and smoked a while, before it could burn clearly enough to allow him to see distinctly what he had done.

On the floor Bernard lay stretched upon his back. Apparently he did not move a muscle after he fell, for his arms were thrown out wide, and the knife was still sticking in his eye, through which its keen point had pierced to the brain, and caused instant death.

Michel gazed at him a long time; he wiped away the blood which covered the dead face, and then first he remembered those features, and recognized the person he had killed. "It ain't no sin to kill dat yer. I'se seen you," (shaking his fist at the corpse,) "I seen yer, wid de dogs, arter de niggers; and de Lord knows how many poor souls 'sides myself I'se saved from worse dan death dis night. You can't do no more harm now, an' it'll be some time afore any body finds out how 'twas de debil took ye."

Here a sudden thought struck him. What if some one, knowing Bernard was coming this way, should miss him from his accustomed haunts, and track him here? What if Massa Hubert had been seen coming this way and going thence, in this same night? Michel knew that they had quarrelled at Mr. Warner's about him, and if the quarrel was known, might not the circumstantial evidence point suspicion to his friend? He knew little of the forms of

law, but his own sagacity told him it would be better for all if the murdered man was never found.

But how to hide him! He had no tools to dig a grave, even if he could carry the body down stairs, which would be difficult; and then a grave would be easily discovered in that soil, and here were traces of blood, which he had no time or means to efface. As he rejected one plan after another, his eye fell on the candle, which was burning low, and in an instant his determination was fixed.

The pieces of the broken step-ladder which had occasioned his accident still lay around, and he piled them together in a spot where the draught of air from the door and window caused the candle to flare most violently. There were some broken shutters, which he could tear from the windows, and one door that was off its hinges. He placed these around in such a way as to catch the flame, and then taking the bowie knife, he cut off his own wristbands, which had been stained with blood, and, thrusting them under the pile, tipped the candle so that the flame caught them, and left it thus upon the floor.

All was as dry as tinder, and the little flame leaped, and curled, and sprang up higher to seize the larger bits of wood. He waited to see that his work was sure, and then went down, through the garden and away into the fields, looking back now and then to note how the flame grew larger and brighter, and sprang from room to room, flashing through heavy hangings of cobwebs, which it had taken years for time to spin, and licking the dust

from the quaint mouldings and carvings — a zealous purifier, that destroyed what it cleansed.

When he was at a safe distance, he paused, and leaning on the fence near, watched the conflagration. Around him was the night, now at its most hushed and witching hour; but though he had formerly suffered so much from superstitious fear, the stern realities of the present had calmed him and made him bold. The air was heavy and oppressive in its stagnant quiet, and the darkness seemed almost tangible, like a veil floating between the earth and the millions of stars that shone in the blue ether. The crescent moon hung over the horizon with a faint, ghastly light, as if she sickened of the sights she might see in the world across whose zenith her path lay.

Clearer and brighter the flames shone out through the windows, and the cracks of the closed shutters, and smoke and sparks poured out of the chimney, with a roar as if renewing again the old times, when festive voices made merry music around the hearthstones, and the house was illumined for nights of Christmas cheer.

Glowing every moment more vividly, the blaze swept from room to room; and at length it rushed from the windows, it pressed out through the roof, it wrapped the chimneys, it ran along the scorched and dying vines, scintillating, flashing, irradiating with its glare all the murky landscape around. Then the roof fell in, the walls dropped away, the burning frame timbers stood up like

fiery skeletons above the ignited mass, and the flames, no longer sparkling, leaping, and coruscating, rose in long, steady tongues of fire, that gradually grew feebler and lower, until all was consumed which could give them vitality; their life and vigor went out, and when darkness and the night resumed their silent reign, nothing remained to tell how Robert Bernard, the slave hunter, had perished from the earth.

CHAPTER TWELFTH.

"A whisper broke the air,
A soft, light tone and low —
O, might it only perish there!
Nor farther go."

Hubert Warner departed, taking Michel with him, unquestioned and unsuspected. If any one at the depot, where they waited for the cars, noticed that the "boy" answered to the description in the advertisement which was posted on the wall near him, his fearless air and his master's presence satisfied them that all was right.

When they arrived in Cuba, Hubert procured medical attendance for him, and he soon recovered from his lameness, and set himself at work, full of hope and courage, to earn his own freedom, and then to lay up sufficient money to buy his wife; and Kissy, hearing through Helen of his well doing, continued so cheerfully in her unrequited toil, that Mrs. Warner was more than ever satisfied of the policy of the *judicious* indulgence of servants.

After Hubert had gone, Helen made another effort to go north for the summer; but Mrs. Warner pleaded so earnestly, and at length, anticipating her maternal right, so playfully commanded her to yield to their wishes and

accompany them on their tour to the springs, that she consented; and her consent once given, she entered with zest into the arrangements which were now being made for a prolonged absence from home.

She was no longer a governess; in her present connection with the family that could not for a moment be allowed; but the children were attached to her, and she continued to give them many lessons without books; and conscious that in her care for them she was useful to Mrs. Warner, she felt no degree of irksome dependence in receiving from these kind friends the pleasures they were so glad to bestow.

They visited the various springs and places of summer resort in the Carolinas and Virginia, and the attention and admiration which Helen every where received delighted her chaperons, who, honest souls, plumed themselves not a little upon having their own sagacity approved by the public voice. Helen had never before been thrown into circles of fashion and gayety, and she enjoyed the novelty, the noise, the excitement, and the free social life of these crowded places, as youth and health must ever do; but the true delight of this most delightful summer was in the secret chambers of her own soul, whose quiet the world could not for one moment invade; in the letters that came constantly from Hubert — paper argosies, bearing the priceless wealth of a manly heart; and in the hope of the time, which every day brought nearer, when they should no longer be separated. For she was not a

person to do or suffer any thing by halves. She had not loved easily, she had been hard to win; but once won, no miser, gloating over his golden hoard, ever held it more supremely precious than she the heart for which she had exchanged her own; no slave, made such by affection as well as birth, ever gave up his own will with more entireness, or studied more eagerly to please and serve, than she sought to obey his lightest wish, and in every action to keep before her hidden thought the care for his approbation were he near; no miner, chained for years in the cold darkness of the subterranean world, ever basked in the soft sunshine and warmth of upper air with more intense delight than she revelled in the ever-present consciousness of the new life she had attained. From place to place our happy party journeyed, as inclination prompted; and after the summer heats grew intense they often found themselves in company with Colonel Bell and his lady, who spent the latter part of the season in the same manner. Helen was a little surprised at the change she noticed in each of them with regard to herself. The colonel, who at first had been so kind, and evidently so much interested in her, now seemed to avoid her whenever he could do so without apparent effort; and his manner was cold, and sometimes she caught his eyes fixed on her with a troubled, dreamy expression, as if he were looking less at her than at the vague and remorseful memories her face awakened. Had she been less happy, less

preoccupied, she would have wearied herself with vain conjectures as to the cause of this; but now she gave it little thought, and was less affected by it than by Mrs. Bell's sudden and extreme politeness and sociability. This annoyed her, for she had an instinctive repugnance for the lady, which could not be conquered by her apparent friendliness; and she never heard the soft tones and honeyed words with which she was now addressed, without a wish to raise her hand and pull away the fair mask which that face seemed to wear.

Cunning dissemblers were Colonel Bell and his wife; and none suspected the loathing and hatred which were concealed beneath their bland and courteous manner to each other. For hidden as it was, and unexpressed, the strife between them had grown desperate. The one crowning virtue of his life was becoming a sin to him, in the unholy and murderous thoughts it occasioned his perplexed brain. The one green and fertile oasis in all the barren desert of his existence was being overgrown with poisonous plants, whose very fragrance pained and sickened him.

What had become of Robert Bernard? This question haunted him night and day. To his presence, to constant and life-long annoyance from him, he had resigned himself; but his absence, his silence, harassed him with a constant fear, that at any moment the cherished secret of his soul might be betrayed to gratify a brutal revenge. He had cautiously made inquiries; but though he could

learn nothing of him, he dared not hope that he was dead. The man had no near relatives, and few friends, and even had search been made for him there was no clew by which to trace him; for Michel had wisely kept the mystery locked in his own breast, and no other mortal knew what became of him after he left Columbia.

Bernard's strange absence puzzled Mrs. Bell no less than her husband, whom she could not help suspecting privy to it; and sometimes surmises crossed her mind, so dark and horrible that they made her cheek blanch, even while they thrilled her with a strange desire to know the truth, if it were so. Once she had dared, in a moment of conversation, to mention his name; but the colonel flashed upon her such a glance from beneath his bent brows, that she hastened to pretend a reference to some of their chance acquaintances. Once, too, in a paroxysm of sudden anger, she had spoken in his ear that word — *murderer*. But there was no starting, no shrinking, no sudden recoil at the sound, and she could not tell whether his calmness was the result of innocence or hardihood.

As the season advanced, however, there had been a change in the colonel's manner towards her. If not more kind, he was more complaisant. Their tour to the springs, where she had exhibited her magnificence to the envy of competitors, had been a gratification to which he acceded without the least objection; and when she spoke of accompanying him to Europe, though he did not consent, he no longer sternly and decidedly refused. Why then

could she not be content to leave him unmolested, and allow the claim which he apparently recognized, though he would not acknowledge, to procure for her what she had so long desired and could not otherwise obtain; for, if there were no other reason, her father, who had lordly ideas of man's supremacy, had left the property she inherited subject to her husband's will. Why should she hazard her fondest ambition? to gratify her spite? Why? Ah, who can tell how blinded, how enslaved, how helpless a person is, who for years has yielded to the sway of bad passions, and broken one by one the restraints of virtue and truth? It becomes so easy to betray the secret malice, that one does it often unconsciously; and the constant presence of Helen Dupré suggested a temptation too strong for Clara Bell to resist. She hardly knew when and where the first insinuation was made, the first whisper hazarded. She dared do nothing openly; but this only made the exercise of a secret power more irresistibly fascinating to her. Beautiful serpent that she was, she stung in the lair where she had hidden, with a double zest, because she knew that if she was seen, the heel she wounded would be raised to crush her.

It is a frightful thing to reflect how little we really know of the thoughts and opinions which those with whom we associate may really hold in regard to us, and how a rumor that involves the dearest interests of our lives may circulate from lip to ear, through the whole circle of our acquaintance, and we all the while be unconscious that

the faces we look upon are studiously hiding what it would shock us to know. It is amazing that these fatal words can be uttered and reuttered, and become trite and old with all who know us, and we be the last to hear. Thus it was in this case. Through one company after another the baleful whisper floated, and they whom it most concerned walked on unperceiving; like the traveller who, peacefully journeying, knows not that his way is along the utmost verge of a precipice. The disgrace was too overwhelming, the consequences to Helen too terrible, for any to dare lightly to mention it to the family with which she was connected; and thinking that after all it might not be true, for few knew certainly whence the report proceeded, partly from the fear and partly from the pity of their friends, they remained ignorant.

But, by degrees, hints and suspicions began to reach the ears of Mr. and Mrs. Warner. People they met complimented Helen with an air of mental reservation, asked mysterious questions about her birth and parentage, suggested the possibility that she might be of Spanish or Indian descent, — certainly not American, — and the importance of being able to trace one's family. It was a long time before even this aroused any doubt or mistrust; and when at last the repeated inquiries excited curiosity, it was still more difficult to gain from any one a reason for the questioning. The story fled before pursuit, as a morning vapor curls backward and vanishes when the sun's rays dart upon it. No one liked to assume the

responsibility of telling the bad news, with proofs and vouchers, and it was not until, as they were returning home in October, they met an old friend and neighbor who had heard it, that Mr. Warner first knew definitely what was said.

They were then within a day's journey of their home, and, shocked and distressed beyond measure, Mr. and Mrs. Warner determined to say nothing about the matter to Helen until they had satisfied themselves that what they had heard was correct. This could only be done by a personal interview with Colonel Bell, who had returned a few days in advance of them.

It was painful to meet Helen the next morning, to see her cheerfulness and her enjoyment of every moment. She had become very dear to them, and they knew that to their son she was the one precious thing which made the joy of life; but if this report should prove true, they must send her away from them, that her separation from him might be more complete and final. All their friendship and admiration for her shrank into nothing before the idea that she was tainted with the blood of the abject race over which they lorded. They could hardly treat her as they had done while even the suspicion attached to her; and yet to inform her would be too cruel while a doubt remained that the charge was true.

Divided between their fears and their pity, they had passed nearly the whole night in conversation and conjectures, not unmixed with tears from Mrs. Warner, and

ejaculations from her husband of thankfulness, that if it should prove as they feared, the discovery had been made before a marriage had complicated affairs still further, and brought the scandal and disgrace more entirely into the bosom of their family.

Unused to concealment, it was hard for them to hide their perturbation during the next day's drive; but when Helen noticed the loss of their usual cheerfulness, they excused themselves by talking about the hard beds and the musquitos of the previous night, and made desperate attempts at gayety with the children; — with Helen they could not laugh. When they stopped at the country inn to dine, they were all glad to see a familiar carriage before the door, and within it the pale, sweet face of Mrs. Avenel.

She was equally pleased to see them. She had been a short distance for a visit of a few days, and was now returning homeward. She, too, had heard the rumor respecting Helen, for the friend whom she visited had been at the White Sulphur Springs when the Warners and Colonel Bell were there; and her unworldly heart swelled with a stronger love for the unfortunate, from whom other friends were ready to drop away.

"Come and ride with me; I am going by Mrs. Warner's, and will set you down there," she said to Helen, when they were ready to leave after dinner, and Helen willingly consented.

"When do you expect Hubert?" she asked, as soon as they had started.

"This is the first day of October," she answered, blushing, "and he writes me that he shall sail from Cuba on the twenty-fifth."

"So long? I hoped he would have been here sooner," Mrs. Avenel said; and she tried to look at Helen, to see if she suspected why she wished it, but her eyes filled so with tears that she was obliged to look down to hide them.

Helen wondered a little at her words and manner, but her friend was often sad, and without seeming to notice, she replied, "Yes, in four weeks he will be here, and then ——" She paused, looking up half shyly, half archly, but Mrs. Avenel only said, —

"True: what then? Who can tell what a day may bring forth? Dear Helen, do not hope too much."

"I try not to," she answered, saddened and affected by the tremulous tones and the air of gentle sorrow; "you seem in low spirits to-day, dear Mrs. Avenel. Why is it? What has happened?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Avenel, growing nervous, and hesitating; "that is — nothing has occurred to me personally; but one is sad sometimes for one's friends, you know."

"Yes, I know; but you must be glad *now* for *me*. My life is as bright as this sunlit afternoon," said Helen, trying to cheer her.

"But the future is very uncertain. I am glad you are

happy now, dear, and I hope and pray you may never be otherwise; but you know trouble may come, and I hope you will try to be prepared for it, if it should. I have lived longer than you, dear, and have seen so many bright hopes go out in darkness, that it almost makes me tremble to see any one so very joyful and happy. Trouble always comes after it. I don't want to frighten you, but I do hope you won't be too sanguine about the future. All is uncertain in this life."

Helen was impressed by her earnest manner, but with the perversity of her exulting happiness, she could not understand it. How could sorrow touch *her*? Was she not beloved? Had not a strong hand torn away the veil from the future, into which she was wont to look sometimes with foreboding glances, and shown her the home of joy which awaited her? She could admit the truth of that trite saying, she could even poetize upon sorrow as a vague abstraction, but she could not think that the phantom would take form and substance, and seize her with an iron grasp, and press out her heart's life-blood. Therefore it was, that humoring her companion's mood, and musing with dreamy carelessness upon the thought presented, she went on — poor victim! — playing with the knife that was to sacrifice her.

"What you say is true," she said, caressing the thin, white hand which the widow had laid in hers. "Sometimes it quite startles me to think of the sudden surprises

20

that meet us every where in life; of the abruptness with which the monotony is broken. For a time one day goes on like another, and there seems no reason why the routine should not continue; and then, hey! presto! change! and we wake up to realize that all our thoughts and plans are turned into a new channel; but when the shock is over, and we catch our breath again, are we not as happy as before? nay, often far happier."

She smiled softly to herself as she spoke. It was easy to see whither her thoughts had flown. But Mrs. Avenel said, with a quiet sigh, —

"Ah, Helen, sometimes we lose life and breath together in the shock."

"Sometimes — yes. I was thinking of this subject the other day, and I'll tell you what it seems like to me. It is like those vast plains, of which travellers in the west give account, where, as one passes on, the eye looks forward over what seems an unbroken level, growing brighter and greener in the distance, and ever smoother as the inequalities disappear in the golden haze with which the atmosphere invests remote spaces. The traveller dreams not of change; but suddenly, in the midst of his security, a chasm yawns at his feet, steep, and with rugged sides, down which he must plunge in pain and peril, and along the rocky bed of whose swollen streams he must wander, the fine prospect all shut out, his wide horizon reduced to the narrow limit of those precipitous banks, until, after infinite difficulty and no little loss, he finds

some place where he can scramble up again to the level plain above. Thus do we look forward unsuspectingly over the fair prairie of life, and thus do we descend into the *cañons* of disappointment, defeat, and sorrow, before we can continue our onward journey."

Mrs. Avenel looked at the bright young face beside her, and again tears filled her eyes as she essayed to speak. Helen saw them, and glancing at the widow's mourning dress, she added, softly, "And sometimes those who went down with us into those gloomy passes return no more to the sunshine and flowers of upper air. The stream at the bottom of the gorge is to them the River of Death."

The tears ran down over the widow's pale cheeks. "Alas," she said, "how many fall thus! how lonely the journey becomes as years roll on! how sudden is always the sense of loss!"

"Yes," replied Helen, "though all things on earth are continually repeating that stern lesson that death is, of all things, the one sure and inevitable, there is in human nature such an antagonism to it, that we always meet it with a shock. And no wonder! How beautiful is life! how the heart rejoices in it, even after experience has taught us of the yawning gulfs which lie hidden beneath the smooth surface of the plain! God meant us to be happy, or else we should not have this gushing fountain of hope, this capacity to forget past pain, and find enjoyment and occupation in the present. Try to do this, dear

Mrs. Avenel, and to be happy. You have lost much, but you still have much left."

To see her thus unconscious was more than Mrs. Avenel could bear. "O, dear child," she exclaimed, "you know little of sorrow, if you think *death* is the worst foe to happiness;" and leaning back in her carriage, she gave way to tears she could no longer restrain.

Helen was surprised at her emotion, but she tried to soothe and divert her by talking of other things, and she partially succeeded; but she was sad all the afternoon, and asked Helen many questions about her early life, trying to make her talk of herself, and to arouse in her mind some sense of the danger which hung over her; and when, after sunset, the carriage stopped at Mr. Warner's door, and Helen gave her a hand at parting, she kissed her tenderly, and said, with an emphasis so marked that it could not fail to arrest her attention, —

"My dear Helen, I love you, and will always be your friend, whatever happens. If trouble comes upon you, remember this, and come to me."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Helen, in some alarm; but there was no time for reply, for at that moment the carriage door was opened, and a clear, happy voice said, —

"Welcome home, Helen, welcome home!"

Mrs. Avenel gave a faint exclamation of joyful surprise; but Helen, paling and then flushing at the sound of that well-known voice, uttered not a word as she surrendered both hands to the quick, strong hands that grasped them.

and, if the truth must be told, her lips likewise to the lips that demanded of them tribute.

"Now it is my turn to say how d'ye, and a warm welcome to you, Mr. Hubert Warner," said Mrs. Avenel, smiling, as she held out her hand. "How happened you to return just at the right time, when we were wishing for you, but did not expect you?"

"I found a weak place in the serried ranks of business engagements, and I broke through *vi et armis.* But were you wishing for me?—was *she?*" nodding towards Helen. "Has she been a good girl since I've been gone?"

"Mighty good—excellent. Be sure you treat her well, now you have returned."

"I don't know about that. It depends upon how she behaves. I used to find her mighty hard to manage," Hubert said, laughing.

"And we are to have a second 'Taming of the Shrew,' I suppose. Poor Petruchio, I pity you."

"Thank you for your pity, but—she hardly looks as if she'd be 'a graceless traitor to her loving lord,' now, does she?" he added, as his eye followed Mrs. Avenel's glance, which rested on Helen's smiling and happy face.

"Appearances are deceitful, but still I think I should trust her," rejoined she, as Hubert helped Helen from the carriage, and then, as the servants came crowding around with their noisy welcomes, their "how d'yes," and "bress de honey, she done come back," Mrs. Avenel laid her hand

on his arm, and added, earnestly, "Remember what I told you — be careful that you value your treasure aright."

He looked at her with some surprise; but she meant to stay for no explanation, and giving the word to her driver, nodded a good by, and was off as fast as two fleet horses could carry her.

"Has Mrs. Avenel gone?" said Helen, looking round. "I meant to have invited her to come in and take tea with us. Why did you let her go so soon? what was she saying to you? what makes you look so sober?"

"What a string of questions! Curiosity, thy name is Helen," Hubert answered, smiling away his momentary annoyance as he led her into the house.

"But I really want to know what she said to you. There has been something peculiar in her manner all the afternoon."

"Very likely," he answered, carelessly; "ladies always get full of whims and fancies when they live alone as much as she does."

"But she intimated that some evil was about to befall me of which I was unaware, and I believe she has been trying to hint something she had not courage to speak," persisted Helen.

"Evil befall you! nonsense! what can happen to hurt you now. *Am not I here?*" And being now in the parlor, with the door shut, this veracious historian must record that he folded his arms about the graceful form beside him, and pressed his lips to hers with a prolonged em-

brace, from which he was startled by a slight noise at the window. Turning, he saw the round head and twinkling eyes of Cæsar Augustus thrust eagerly through the half-open shutter, his mouth working and his lips smacking from sympathy; and finding himself discovered, he called out with a *naiveté* that would have deceived one who knew him less.

"Ki! Mass Hubert, 'pears like dat ar mus' taste good!"

"This is unendurable!" Hubert exclaimed, wrathfully, making a spring to catch him; but he ran round the corner and down the steps with the swiftness of a hare, and when he had reached a safe distance, they heard him singing, —

"Charley loves good cake and ale,
Charley loves good brandy,
Charley loves to kiss the girls
As sweet as sugar candy."

Mrs. Avenel's carriage had so far out-travelled the large and heavily-laden family coach, that the lovers had been half an hour engaged in quiet and delicious converse before the renewed commotion among the servants gave token of its approach. Hubert heard his father's voice giving directions about untying the trunks, and his mother's hearty tones as she answered and asked questions, and responded to greetings, in the same breath, while the children were being half-smothered in kisses and caresses. "Come, let us go to meet them," he said to Helen; and they went out together, at the very moment when a dozen

voices uttered, simultaneously, "Mass' Hubert done come las' night." Hubert, stooping down to catch up little Angie, who had at the first glimpse sprung to meet him, did not see the expression of blank dismay that overspread the faces of both his parents at the sound of his name, or witness the glance which passed between them; but Helen noticed both, and her heart beat with a wild and sudden fear. What was it that could cloud these brows, wont to beam with such unchanging good nature, and make these parents fear to see their son? Faint and pale she turned away, longing to ask these questions, and yet dreading the answer that might be given; and she watched with nervous anxiety through the evening for some solution of the fearful mystery. But Mr. and Mrs. Warner left them alone, alleging household affairs as an excuse for absence; and Hubert laughed at what he called her fancies, and tenderly chid her for unreasonable gloom at an hour when her joy should be absorbing and entire.

"Have you sent word to Colonel Bell?" inquired Mrs. Warner of her husband, as they retired to their chamber.

"Yes, I wrote a note after tea, and despatched a boy with it, asking him to come over to-morrow. I say, wife, if he has known this all the time, and it is true, he has been most shamefully imposing on us. By gracious! I've known duels fought for far smaller offences. Think of trying to palm a girl with negro blood in her veins on

us as a white person, and allowing our son to marry her. It is outrageous."

"My only hope is, that the story is not true," said his wife, in a tone as faint as her hope was. "If I hadn't heard so much, at the time it happened, about that girl who bewitched Colonel Bell, I should say it could not be true. But there is no telling what a man may do, who went so far as he did;" and she sighed heavily.

"I declare I want to horsewhip him! How much trouble it will make! And we have thought so much of Helen! Poor child, it will be hard for her."

"It will, indeed. I can't bear to think what she will suffer; but then there is no alternative. Of course Hubert must give her up."

"Certainly, there is no question about that. He is so fond of her that I believe nothing else would induce him to break off the match — not even illegitimate birth, if she were only white — but he cannot do any thing else now."

They spoke sadly, but with a certain degree of calmness. In spite of all their former appreciation of Helen, and affection for her, they had, from the moment they admitted the strong suspicion that she was of negro lineage, insensibly and unconsciously held their sympathies a little aloof from her, removed her a little way over the line which separated them from the lower race. So strong was the force of prejudice, so rooted the habit of

regarding the sensibilities of such as blunter, the feelings less keen, than their own, that they could no longer think of her as enjoying or suffering as she once did. They cared nothing for her poverty, little for the uncertainty which hung over her early days; all that would have moved some minds had been nobly disdained by them, so long as they considered her entitled to the sympathy which was so freely accorded by them to any of their own race. But this unlooked-for, unthought-of knowledge presented an obstacle which could not be overcome, and changed at once the whole current of their thoughts and feelings.

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

"She was a form of life and light,
That, seen, became a part of sight,
And rose where'er I turned my eye,
The morning star of memory."

"I grant *my* love imperfect, all
That mortals by the name miscall;
Then deem it evil, what thou wilt,
But say, O, say, *hers* was not guilt."

The evening was waning. There had been company to dinner, and as they had not long been gone, Mrs. Bell still remained in the drawing room, leaning back with stately gracefulness in the depths of a cool but luxurious cane chair, whose light meshes did not hinder her enjoyment of the mild breeze that sighed through the apartment. She was dressed in white muslin, elaborately embroidered; jewels decked her hair, confining a *coiffure* of delicate black lace, which contrasted with her glossy, golden hair, and falling down to her shoulders, heightened the dazzling whiteness of her neck, and the delicate bloom of her cheek, where a faint roseate light seemed shining through the transparent complexion. Two or three bracelets encircled her arms, which the loose sleeves

falling back left bare nearly to the shoulders, and a necklace with pendents of rare device rose and fell with the white curves of her bosom. Behind her stood a young girl, whose plain attire and dusky hue served as a foil for this regal and radiant beauty, from whom her ever-waving fan of gaudy peacock feathers kept the musquitos, and the too oppressive heat of the night.

At a little distance from her, Colonel Bell was lounging on a divan, reading a newspaper. For a few days an unusual harmony had prevailed between these married foes. Hearing nothing from Bernard, and nothing of him, the colonel was beginning to hope that some unknown accident had fortunately taken him out of the way, and it had occurred to him that, this being the case, it would insure the safety of his darling child to remove his wife from this part of the country; and to do this, the most feasible plan was to accede to her desire for a European residence. Therefore he had been cautious to avoid offending her; the sarcastic remarks which used to enrage her had entirely ceased, and the servants wondered to see them polite, and almost kind to each other.

Mrs. Bell was good natured, for she thought her triumph over her husband was complete, and with pleased alacrity she had commenced her preparations for an early departure. The thought of her perfidy towards him only troubled her as the fear crossed her mind that the rumor she had put in circulation might reach his ear before the

time fixed for leaving; but even in that case, she trusted to the difficulty of tracing the report to her.

A light footstep approached, and a servant, bowing obsequiously, handed the colonel a letter in a shallow basket of silver filigree work. He took it, inquiring if any answer was requested, and being informed that the servant who brought it had gone immediately, he laid it aside until he had finished the article he was reading.

Then sitting up, he opened it with a careless expression of wonder as to which of his neighbors had been writing to him; but the words were arrested on his lips, as he glanced at the signature, and even by the dim light which pervaded the room, Clara saw that, as he read, his face grew pale and paler, until its whiteness was ghastly, and a cold sweat stood on his brow. Then came the dark, the terrible expression into his eyes, and around the rigid lines of his mouth, — the expression from which she always shrank, and rising suddenly, the letter crushed in his hand, he crossed over to where she sat, and seizing her shoulders in a strong grasp that left marks on their polished surface, he shook her slightly, with a convulsive motion, as if he could have torn her to pieces, and, bending down, hissed in her ear, —

"Woman — liar — you have betrayed me!"

It was a frightful moment; and the servant dropped the fan with a cry of fear, as she saw the action and the look; but though she trembled before it, Clara's self-

possession did not desert her. Meeting the fury of his glance with a timid air of injured innocence, she said, in deprecating tones, —

"Indeed I have not. Why should I? Have you not done all I asked of you?"

"Why do you shrink and tremble so, then? You know you are lying to me."

"I am not; pray, believe me; but you hurt me; your nails are piercing my skin; see there!" and as he removed his hand, she held up the smooth shoulder, livid with his strong pressure. His manhood blushed at the idea of physical cruelty to a woman, and, as he murmured some indistinct apology, she took courage, and added, —

"Who has accused me of this? What reason can I have for wishing to injure you?"

She had gone too far in her mock humility, and his lip curled in scorn as he replied, "What reason, indeed! Do you think me a fool? Remember the flower you gave me; I have it yet. Remember its meaning — concealed hatred. Yes, you hate me; I know it; and if it were otherwise, there is that in you which would make you rejoice to trample in the dust one who was weaker than yourself. Clara Bell, I know you well, and if you have been the cause of this disappointment, you shall rue the day in which you dared my power."

That little word *if* gave her hope, since it showed he was not quite certain of her perfidy, and she answered

calmly, and with enough of her usual hauteur to give what she said the semblance of sincerity, —

"Since you are determined to regard me as an enemy, and to deny me the least possible kind feeling, pray consider, Colonel Bell, that I should lose every thing, and gain nothing, by betraying your secret. However foolish and unjustifiable I may think your course, still, so long as you choose to pursue it, I have an advantage over you, which I should indeed be a *fool* to throw away for the sake of any pitiful spite against that girl. Don't you every day acknowledge this power? Has it not led you to grant me that which you had sworn should never be?"

"It is true," he said, with a change of manner, too much occupied with his own thoughts to notice the triumphant tone in which her words ended. Then seeming for the first time to recollect the presence of the servant, he picked up the letter, which had fallen on the floor, and abruptly left the room.

As he disappeared, the whole expression of Clara's face altered. She raised her clinched fist, and shook it after him, exclaiming aloud, "Fool! fool! I have outwitted you," and then broke into a long, mocking laugh.

Colonel Bell entered his library, and, locking the doors, paced the floor with hurried step and scowling brow. His passions, always violent and ungovernable, now hurried him on headlong; a fierce light glowed upon his face like the lurid glare of the pit. His brain reeled with the

excitement, and his nerves were alternately rigid and powerless, with the desperation of his soul.

Again and again he read the letter. It was very short and simple, stating nothing of how the report had reached Mr. Warner, but mentioning it in brief terms, and calling upon him by the honor of a gentleman to appear and refute or confirm the story. His position was indeed trying. All that was good or evil in his nature combined together to urge him to denial and concealment. The undying love of his youth prompted him to brave all things to save Corilla's child from suffering and shame. His pride and obstinacy of character forbade him to yield his own wishes to the force of circumstances, to subject himself to the gossip and blame of his neighbors, or, more than all, to allow his wife a triumph so complete. And if he acknowledged the truth, what would be the consequence? Would he not be indignantly censured for allowing Helen to be considered as a white person, and to mingle in society as an equal? He knew the feelings of his acquaintances on this subject. To be the father of colored children was not esteemed dishonorable; but to recognize the paternal relation, and fulfil paternal duties, was to brand one's self with everlasting disgrace. And pursuing this thought farther, how could he ever meet the torrent of indignation which would be poured forth, if the truth were now concealed, and Hubert Warner should be allowed to marry Helen, and afterwards discover that he had been deceived?

He shrank from even the imagination of the disgrace such a combination of circumstances would throw upon him; for the selfishness of a whole lifetime was not to be braved and set aside in a moment, and every man feels most keenly that which in the opinion of his fellows most affects his reputation. He began to ask himself what it would avail to continue a struggle by which he would only involve himself more and more. Now he could explain and apologize; but if he once denied, upon his honor, the truth of the rumor, he would be committed to a course from which he might at any time be driven, with unutterable dishonor, by the malice or the revenge of Robert Bernard. If he could only have believed that man dead, he might perhaps have stifled his innate repugnance to the deliberate falsehood he was so strongly tempted to speak. But people do not often die so opportunely, and he could risk nothing on that hope.

Reluctantly he resolved to confess all; and then, in the midst of a terrible vision of Helen's dismay and grief, came a sudden thought which cast a gleam of mournful pleasure across the anguish of his heart. If she were conscious of her birth, if she were deserted by all former friends, to whom could she cling for protection, to whom could she look for comfort, but to him? He stopped short in his hurried walk, and stretched out his arms as if towards her. "If that could be," he said, in a low, fervent tone, "there would be yet one drop of comfort in

this bitter draught. We would go together to some foreign land, and there she would grow content, and learn to think of me as a father; and O, to have Corilla's child lean her head upon my breast, and look up to me with her mother's eyes of love! what happiness! what blessed joy!"

Mrs. Warner had suggested that it would be best to receive Colonel Bell in the office, as they would there be less liable to interruption, or to be overheard by the servants; and it was important that if their fears were confirmed they should have time to consult together, before informing any other member of the family of the painful facts.

Accordingly, when Colonel Bell appeared the next morning at the door, the servant, in obedience to previous directions, guided him to the place where they awaited him. It was a small building, at some distance from the house, containing one room of considerable size, where the business of the plantation was transacted. To reach it the colonel crossed the garden, and went into an enclosure planted with fruit trees of various kinds, and some grape vines, which were trained beside the high fence, across a lattice work. At the farther end of the enclosure stood the place he sought. He found Mrs. Warner with a pale, agitated face, which bore the traces of tears, and her husband at his desk nervously cutting slips of paper

with his penknife, and pretending to be writing, when in reality he was looking through the open door for the approach of the dreaded guest.

An embarrassed salutation passed between them, while the servant placed a chair and withdrew. Then, closing the door, Mr. Warner said, hesitatingly, —

"You will understand, sir, how painful a situation this is, in which we now find ourselves. Excuse my sending for you, but you see it is necessary for us to know ——"

"I will spare you further explanation," interrupted Colonel Bell, looking deathly pale, and speaking with great difficulty; "I will confess the truth to you. The story you have heard is true."

"And you have known it all the time?" they both exclaimed, at the same moment.

"That Helen was my daughter? Yes, since last spring I have known it."

"O, poor, poor Helen, what will become of her! And to think how we have been introducing her every where into society, and been so fond of her! What will the neighbors think of us?" and Mrs. Warner burst into tears of mingled grief and mortification.

"Then I must say, sir, that you have treated us very unhandsomely, and are very much to blame," Mr. Warner said, warmly.

Colonel Bell looked from one to the other with an air of sullen gloom, and replied, —

"Allow me to explain to you the peculiar circumstances

which have led to these results, and then perhaps you will not regard me as an unpardonable impostor. It is not a very long story, and will not tax your patience too severely." He paused, and for a few moments seemed lost in thought, from which he was aroused by Mr. Warner's rather impatient "Well, sir!"

"Excuse me; I was thinking where I should begin my tale."

"Begin at the beginning, sir, and tell the whole, sir," said Mr. Warner, in a tone of asperity.

A momentary flash of anger shot from his eyes; but it passed away, and he proceeded in a low, calm voice.

"When I returned from college to my father's house, I found a young girl, whose peculiar and wonderful beauty at once attracted my attention. She, with her mother, had been purchased during my absence. I think, though the mother looked like a full quadroon, there must have been Indian blood in her veins; for the child had the clear dark complexion, the fine soft hair, and the Spanish style of beauty, which the union of these two races often produces. The same type of face, still further Anglicized, appears in Helen, whose fatal resemblance to her mother has been the cause of this sad discovery."

"I beg you to understand, sir," interrupted Mr. Warner, "that we do not *regret* a discovery which has saved our family from an intolerable disgrace. It is painful, sir, but the regret is, that we did not know it sooner."

"Perhaps you don't regret it," retorted Colonel Bell, "but I do; I loved Corilla — I love her child — I meant she should never suffer for the shame of her birth."

"You did very wrong, sir, very wrong. Your affection for such a child should not have made you forget the claims that others had upon you, sir."

"Hush, father! don't interrupt him," said Mrs. Warner, in a fidgety, anxious manner. "I am afraid somebody may come to interrupt us before he gets through with the story. I remember, Colonel Bell, hearing a great deal about that affair of yours in the time of it, and I must say it was very little to your credit."

"Perhaps so," he answered, dryly. "I confess that, at the time, I thought my love for Corilla, and the care and tenderness with which I treated her, almost the only pure thing in my life. Certain it is, I have never lived five years in which I can remember so much happiness. But I must not forestall my story. I told you how I found her. We were of course very much in each other's society, for she was my mother's favorite attendant; and I will swear to you that, young libertine as I was then, the purity and modest dignity of that young girl won from me a respect which made me blush for an unholy thought in her presence. One day, on entering my mother's sitting room, I found Corilla reading aloud. This was a great surprise, and in reply to my remark upon it, I learned that she had been carefully raised by her late mistress; and having naturally uncommon capacity for learn-

ing, she had eagerly improved every means of instruction, and was really as well informed as half the young ladies one meets. Of course her reading had been desultory, and her mind was undisciplined, for she had chiefly read such books as an invalid mistress wished to hear. But I never saw any thing like the child's thirst for knowledge, and I never took such delight in any thing as in reading to her and my mother, and hearing the remarks she sometimes ventured to make in a moment of forgetfulness. She was never forward or obtrusive; but seated with her work at my mother's feet, I have watched her face change with succeeding emotions, and her large black eyes raised suddenly with such a flash of intelligence as almost startled me."

"I wonder your mother allowed you there so much," said Mrs. Warner.

"She seemed at last to awake to the conviction that I was becoming very fond of reading to her, and of staying in doors; or, rather, my father did; for one day I heard him say, it appeared to him I staid in her room too much, and asked if it would not be well to send Corilla away when I was there; but she answered, 'Pooh! there is no danger. I like to have him read to me; and as to Corilla, I would trust her virtue as quick as I would my own.' They did not seem to think for a moment that her very virtue and delicacy was what refined and fixed my boyish passion.

"However, for a few days she heeded my father's

advice, and Corilla was banished from any room where I chanced to be. But then her mother, to whom she was much attached, died, after a short illness; and in her overwhelming grief my kind mother could no longer refuse her the occupation and amusement which alone had any power to comfort her for her loss. She was admitted again to our morning readings; and then I grew bolder, and pretended to have weak eyes, that I might get her allowed to read in my presence. What a pleasure it was to me to hear her low musical voice, and see how quickly she caught the inspiration of the page over which she bent! Then I pretended to criticize her reading, and make her repeat certain passages again and again, that I might force her to look at me and talk to me, and thus put myself into communication with her; for all this time, such was her innate delicacy, and her obedience to what she afterwards told me were her mother's instructions, that she would hardly ever remain with me a moment, or look at me, except in my mother's presence. The chamber of my mother was her inviolable sanctuary. My father, coming in one day, found me thus teaching her to read some passages from Shakspeare, and put a stop to the business by sending her abruptly out of the room. Nothing was said to me; but the next week I was sent away from home, and on various pretexts of business or pleasure kept away three months."

He paused and added, bitterly, "It had been well if

I had never returned — if the death which made me an orphan had taken me instead. In an imprudent summer journey to Charleston, my father took the fever, and died. I heard of his death, and came home in time to close my mother's eyes, and hear her farewell words. She had been long an invalid, and grief killed her.

"My sister returned to her home in New Orleans, from whence she had come to the funeral, and left me alone in the desolated house. It was necessary I should remain there, for their sudden deaths had left all business unfinished, and there was much which claimed my attention. Corilla was there, shy, modest, and pure as ever, but grieving deeply for the death of her beloved and kind mistress, and sympathizing so deeply with my trouble that all barriers of reserve were soon broken down.

"What could be expected of two young creatures brought together under such circumstances? We loved each other deeply, wildly; but we could not marry, for she was the child of a slave. O, sir, I ask you, I ask you, madam, were we, *was she*, to be blamed for what followed? If there was any fault, it attached to me; for when she had once acknowledged her love, she had no longer power or will of her own. I believe she adored the ground I walked on. She looked up to me with a humble reverence that was bewitching, and esteemed my college smattering of Greek and Latin the height of all human knowledge. I taught her to play the guitar, and

to sketch, for which she really had great talent. Ah, those were happy days."

"But for all that, sir, you were very much to blame," said Mr. Warner, impatiently. "Please proceed to the facts of the case," he added, with an emphasis that showed he had little patience for the indulgence of sentiment.

"I will hasten," said Colonel Bell. "I have lingered, because I dislike to come to that part of my life of which I am ashamed."

"Pray, sir, and are you not ashamed of that part of which you have told us?" interrupted Mr. Warner.

"No, sir, I am not," said Colonel Bell, looking up boldly. "My love for Corilla was the only pure affection of my life; and if sin or shame resulted from it, the blame rests with the laws of society, which drove us into a false position. I would gladly have married her if I could."

"But you had a wife at the very time," said Mrs. Warner, indignantly.

"Not then, but afterwards. I confess my marriage was wrong, and I have always wondered how I allowed myself to consent to it. It was one of those things men sometimes do by the suggestion and help of others, without realizing what they are about, until it is too late. My father had proposed the alliance before his death, and my sister insisted that I should fulfil the engagement he had made for me. I gave the matter little thought, taking it for granted I must marry, and thinking the lady proposed would do as well as any one.

"The bride was willing, the preliminaries were all arranged by my sister, and I was sent for to go and act as bridegroom. Then first I told Corilla of my intentions, and asked her to remove to a small cottage I had fitted up for her on a distant part of my estate. She, poor thing, was dreadfully shocked."

"The impudent —" began Mrs. Warner; but a fiery glance from his eyes checked her, and she added, in a milder tone, "I must scold a little, for it provokes me to see how completely that girl deceived you."

"You mistake; it was I who deceived her. In the innocent simplicity of her heart she had believed my vows of eternal constancy meant what they said, and that I considered her as holding the relation of a wife.

"No doubt it should have been thus, but few men are wiser than their generation; and though I loved her, respected her, — ay, as I have respected few women since, — I had never viewed our relation as she had done. When she found herself degraded from the position of wife to that of mistress, a great change came over her, and she was never after happy as she had been.

"She submitted to my wish, and removed to the cottage. I shall never forget her looks when she first stepped in the door, and saw the fanciful elegance with which I had furnished her apartments. Her eyes were very expressive; she could throw all her soul out through them at times; and she gave me then one quick glance of gratitude and pleasure, and with a grace all her own she

took my hand and kissed it. Then she clasped her child, little Helen, to her bosom, and sinking on the floor at my feet, and leaning her head against my knee, burst into tears.

"I understood the gesture, and no words could have so moved me as did those silent tears. But she never reproached me, or complained. She was humble and grateful, and after a little while she strove to be cheerful when in my presence, and we returned to our old pursuits and enjoyments; but I could see there was a weight upon her spirits, and I have since been told by her servants, that in my absence she spent whole days in tears.

"We had then two children, Helen and Charles, and their prattle amused her, and the care of them occupied her; but they were nevertheless a source of great anxiety. As her maternal feelings developed, she grew thoughtful and careful for the future, and sometimes even proposed that I should give them all free papers, and send them away; for she feared something unforeseen might expose them to a life of ignorance and servitude; and I grew half jealous of the children, who seemed to divide her care and love for me.

"Men are selfish wretches, and I was no better than my kind. I meant to do right by them all, but I never aroused to the necessity for placing her wholly at ease, until she had gone to the world where anxieties cease. When Helen was four years old, and Charles was two, their mother died suddenly, — died in agony; the cholera

penetrated even to the home where I had hidden her: there was no time for farewells."

His voice had been growing weak and husky for the last few sentences, and now it became inaudible; and after a momentary struggle, he yielded to the keen feelings his story had recalled, and they saw tears dropping from beneath the hand with which his eyes were shaded. In spite of their prejudices, his hearers, too, were affected, and for a short time there was entire silence.

Colonel Bell recovered himself with an effort, and looking up again, said, sadly, "There is little more to tell, for I will not trouble you with my grief or my remorse. I determined to revenge upon myself the negligence which had caused her pain, by separating myself from the children of my love, and to satisfy the spirit of the dead by placing them in a position that suited their father's race. I had them conveyed away, and persuaded the few who knew of their existence to believe they were dead. Then I carried them to New York, made inquiries which informed me where they would be well treated, and left them there. I managed to convey a yearly remittance for their education, until they had arrived at the age when I thought they would be likely to make some attempt to discover where the money came from, and then I sent a certain sum, with a letter, stating that no more would be remitted. I thought it better for them to depend upon themselves for a livelihood, rather than to run any risk

of learning the secret of their birth; and I intended to watch over and help them, when it seemed necessary.

"During all these years I had not seen them; most of the time I had been abroad; but then I left directions with my banker to transmit the money, though he knew not to whom it was sent, or why it was sent so privately.

"After my last return from Europe, I went to the place where I left them, but found the school broken up, and the person who had charge of them removed. I dared not make much inquiry, lest I should excite curiosity, and therefore was unable to get such clew to their location as would enable me to find them, and knew nothing of their situation until I met Helen on the boat last spring. I knew her in a moment, from her likeness to her mother — the beautiful, the noble girl. Can you wonder that I shrank from turning the morning of her life into midnight gloom? — that I could not inform either her or you of the fatal truth which would curse her days —— "

At this moment they were startled by a noise outside the window, and immediately Hubert's voice called loudly for help.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

"O, agony! fierce agony,
For loving heart to brook
For one brief hour the withering power
Of unimpassioned look.
O, agony! sharp agony,
For heart that's proud and high,
To learn of fate how desolate
It may be ere it die."

Some time after Colonel Bell entered Mr. Warner's office, Hubert and Helen were returning from a morning ramble through the woods. Notwithstanding her joy at his return, and his efforts to cheer her, she had passed a sad and sleepless night, and descended to the breakfast table, looking so low spirited and pale, that he had insisted she should go out into the open air, and let the sunshine dissipate her vapors.

His medicine had been so far successful that she enjoyed her walk, and was returning in a much more cheerful mood. As they came along the path beside the high fence which had been built to keep thieves from the fruit garden, Hubert, looking up, saw some fig branches hanging down from the top of the wall, and made an effort to reach the fruit. They proved to be half ripe, and throwing them away, he said, —

"Let us go in at the gate, and get some from the other side. I used to like the figs that grew on this south wall better than any I ever ate, and we will see if they still retain their flavor."

Accordingly, when they reached the little gate near the office, Hubert opened it, and went in, while Helen stood in the gateway, waiting for him. As she waited, she spied some very fine ones growing against the side of the office building, and seeing that Hubert was having poor success in his search, she went to gather these herself. They were a little above her reach, and stepping on the crotch of the vine-like tree, she clung to the tough branch, and, reaching up, was about to grasp them, when her attention was arrested by a voice within the window near which her ear was brought by this sideway position. She listened an instant thoughtlessly, as one might do to recognize the voice, and then she heard her own name, and then —— By degrees her hands grew rigid, her limbs grew cold, and like one petrified she remained clinging to the branches.

Hubert, having secured his prize, came near, and, seeing her strange posture, said gayly, with slight surprise in his tone, "What are you doing, Helen, — listening? Don't you know listeners hear no good to themselves?"

But she turned towards him a face so ashen white, so sharpened and changed by sudden agony, that he uttered an exclamation of fear. She held up her hand as a signal for silence, and for a few moments he waited impatiently,

with occasional questions, in a low voice, to which she returned no answer, and seemed not to notice. The shutters were closed, and as he stood on the ground, he could hear nothing but a low murmur, or now and then an indistinct word; but *she* heard all the last part of Colonel Bell's sad story — heard it with a quick chill of apprehension, and a conviction of evil that left no room for doubt or question.

"What is it, Helen? You frighten me. Come down," Hubert said, at length, peremptorily, pulling at her dress. She yielded, and fell into his arms rigid and pale as a corpse. Her eyes were open, and her breath came with faint gasps. He spoke to her in terror, and pressed her to his heart. Then consciousness returned. She struggled feebly to release herself, threw up her arms with an hysterical sob, and fainted entirely away.

Hubert's loud cry for help brought them all to the door. When she saw Helen's position, Mrs. Warner uttered a groan.

"O, dear!" she said to her husband, "I always heard that living trouble was worse than dead trouble, and I begin to believe it. That poor girl has overheard us. What in the world shall we do with her?"

Colonel Bell had sprung forward to assist Hubert, who, when the door was opened, carried Helen into the office, and laid her on the sofa there; and now his mother joined him. They were so much alarmed at her deathlike aspect, that for a few moments not a word was spoken,

or a question asked, as they bathed her face and hands with water, and strove to recall the life which fluttered so faintly, and seemed about to expire.

But at length she opened her eyes, and Mrs. Warner, seeing she was out of danger, bade them go away and leave her; for she dreaded the result of excitement in the first moments of consciousness. Then Hubert recollected the mystery which attended this sudden illness, and turning to his father, said, "What is it? What did she overhear? What could you say to affect her thus?"

Mr. Warner drew him to the farther side of the room, and whispered in low, reluctant tones, —

"You must calm yourself, my son. We have learned something from Colonel Bell which pains us exceedingly, and will make you feel even worse than we do. Your plans are most sadly broken up. You cannot marry Helen."

"Why not, pray? What do you mean?" interrupted he, impatiently.

"Because, my poor boy, she is of negro descent; she is the child of a slave."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Hubert. "Show me the man who dares say so. What, Helen! *my Helen!* Impossible! It is a base lie."

"Be calm, my son," repeated Mr. Warner, himself trembling all over with excitement. "It is a dreadful thing, I know, but I fear it is true."

"I tell you it is a lie; I will never believe it. Who has so imposed upon you? Is it Colonel Bell?"

"Colonel Bell has acknowledged reluctantly what I had heard before from other sources. There is no doubt of it, my son; you must believe it."

"Believe it! never! Colonel Bell, what do you mean by daring to say such a thing?" Hubert said, turning fiercely to the unhappy man, who stood at a little distance, with eyes fixed on Helen, and a face scarcely less pale and distressed than her own. At another time, he would have resented the tone of this question; but now his spirit seemed broken, and he replied, humbly,—

"I have only told the truth. I cannot repeat the story; but your father will tell all. She is my child—my unfortunate child."

"You lie, sir!" cried Hubert, almost distracted. "Do you realize what is involved in this slander? I tell you it is false."

Even this did not rouse Colonel Bell. He only answered in the same sad tone, "Alas! it is too true. Why should I say it, if it were not? Look at me. Do you think I suffer less than you? Do you think it is nothing to me to blast hopes that were dearer to me than life?—to ruin the happiness of my beloved daughter? Look at me, Hubert Warner, and see if I look like a triumphant slanderer."

His quiet air, so unlike any thing ever before known of him, staggered Hubert's obstinate incredulity more than

thousand proofs written with pen of fire. He struck his forehead and groaned in desperation.

"Who calls me daughter," said Helen's faint voice; and she tried to raise herself and look around. "Orphan so long, and homeless, who claims me now? who comes to take away my happiness?"

These pitiful accents moved them all to tears. She gazed from one to the other with a vague, bewildered air; for her recollection was indistinct, and she was conscious only of some great and sudden sorrow. But as she read their faces, and her thoughts grew clear, her voice took a stronger tone, and a wild, fearful light came into her eyes.

"What did I hear?" she exclaimed; "what was it Colonel Bell was saying? tell me. I heard part; what is it?" Her face pleaded even more touchingly than her words; but none answered her. Who could be the first to tell such news? At that moment Mr. and Mrs. Warner could forgive Colonel Bell for what they had before deemed his treacherous silence.

He nerved himself at length to the task, and seating himself near, took her hand.

"Helen," he said, "do not curse me. God knows I did not mean that this should ever be. I thought I could save you from sorrow. But our sins follow us forever," he added, with a groan; "even from the grave they rise to pursue us relentlessly. I wronged your mother, and *this* is my bitter punishment."

"Who was my mother?" Helen asked, in a hard, nervous tone.

"She was Corilla."

"A servant! a slave girl!"

"Yes; but, O Helen, my child, do not hate me, do not spurn me," he added, beseechingly; for she had withdrawn her hand quickly, and a strange, defiant, disdainful expression had settled upon her face. "All others will turn from you now; you have only me; do not hate me for this trouble that I could not help."

"I do hate you," she exclaimed; "go away! I hate myself. What right had you to say I have no friends—that I must be dependent upon you? I have a brother."

"And you have *me* too; I will not give you up, Helen," said Hubert, who, after the first shock, had been standing in gloomy silence; but now every generous impulse of his soul was roused to aid his love for her. "I will not leave you," he repeated, and took both her hands in his.

She looked up with a grateful smile, but when her eyes fell again on Colonel Bell, her expression grew hard and firm.

He shook his head, with a mournful and incredulous aspect, murmuring, "Alas, poor child! you cannot help trusting him, and yet he will not be above the prejudice of his race. You will only have one more pang, in finding yourself deceived."

"I am not deceived," Helen said, quickly. "He is kind and generous; but I know how it must be. Yes,"

she added, clasping his hands tighter, while her voice grew slightly tremulous, "I knew from the first moment that this would part us; and if I cling to him now, it is only because I know it is but for a little while. But *you*, — do you suppose I will turn to *you*? Sooner would I beg from door to door. *You* are the cause of all my misery."

She shrank still farther from him as she spoke; for in this moment of tumult and anguish of heart, all thought of the bitterness and shame of her lot seemed to merge themselves in an unreasoning and revengeful dislike to him, who, in giving her being, had forced upon her so much sorrow.

"Is this all you can say to me?" he answered, in a stifled voice — "to me, who have thought of you so many years with such interest, and, since I have known you, with so much affection? Do try to forgive me. I did not mean to cause you sorrow. O Helen, you are your mother's image — your mother, who loved me so well."

"*My mother, whom you wronged so deeply!*" Helen replied, in stern and cutting tones; and Colonel Bell, too deeply pained for words, went out of the room to hide his emotions.

Mr. Warner was about to interfere, and put an end to this interview, which he had watched in silent anxiety; but Hubert took the place Colonel Bell had vacated, and still pressing her cold, trembling hands, he said, earnestly,

"Helen, even now I cannot believe this. There must be some mistake: mistakes are easily made. Tell me what you know of your childhood. I have heard you speak of it as a vague memory; but can't you think of something which can refute this slander? Do you believe what this man has said?"

She grew excited now, and tearful; but she struggled to retain her self-possession. "I cannot deceive you," she said, "you or your dear mother and father, who have been so kind to me. I know how you will feel — I know what you will think, but I cannot deceive you. There have been indistinct recollections in my brain, on which his words have thrown a sudden light; then his evident interest in me from the first — when we met on the boat — and his agitation. O Hubert! O Mrs. Warner! If it is true what will become of me? And Charles! my poor brother! O, it is too much, too much!"

Her words were lost in sobs and tears that soon became convulsive and hysterical. Hubert was unwilling to leave her; but his father forced him away, and his mother insisted that only by being left alone could Helen regain the calmness and strength necessary to enable her to return to the house without revealing the secret, which she was desirous of keeping from the family as long as possible.

They found Colonel Bell walking in the garden, just before the door. He had still much to say, and Hubert had many questions to ask. With reckless and unsparing

hand he probed the old wound, inquiring into all the minutiæ of evidence, and examining all the details of that sad story; and in satisfying himself of Helen's identity with the rumor which his father had heard, he unwittingly drew from Mr. Warner the fact of Mrs. Bell's complicity with the affair.

The colonel started when he heard this, and the subdued, grief-stricken expression of his face became strangely mingled with one harder and more bitter; but he made no reference to what he thus learned. It was long before Hubert could yield to the terrible conviction, against which he fought with a strong and wilful scepticism; and when at length he could not help believing, no words can describe the perplexed and angry feelings that mixed themselves with his distress.

Before Colonel Bell left them he wished again to see Helen; but she was unwilling to admit him, and he was obliged to be satisfied with leaving kind words for her with Mrs. Warner — words from which she turned indignantly away. She had waited impatiently for their long talk to be ended. She longed for the solitude of her chamber, and she felt it impossible to go through the garden while they were there. Realizing every moment more and more of what this dread discovery entailed upon her, she shrank from meeting any eye, from hearing any voice, that could, by pity or by wonder, remind her of the change it made in her condition.

With passionate bursts of tears, and restless, impatient

motions, she paced the floor, now giving herself up to the full power of her fears, and now clinging to a hope, which even then she felt was mockery — the hope that Hubert, who would never yield to less than an entire certainty, might find some escape from this pitiless doom. Poor girl! how she watched him! how she hung upon his gestures, as standing beneath the trees he questioned Colonel Bell and his father! and how her heart thrilled, when once he made a few rapid steps towards the office, as if coming to seek her.

At length Colonel Bell took from his pocket book a paper, which Bernard had given in exchange for the five thousand dollars which had been paid to secure his silence; worthless indeed, except as a most fearful proof that another besides the colonel had recognized Helen from her resemblance to her mother. Then, through the office window, she saw him take from his vest pocket a small case, which apparently contained a miniature. She saw Hubert take it, look at it a few moments, and then dash it to the ground and walk hurriedly away. It was Corilla's miniature — a last, convincing proof, against which his whole soul rebelled, even while it sank confused and overwhelmed.

Then her senses seemed to fail, and for a moment all things vanished from before her eyes, and the sunlight was darkened. The last faint spark of hope went out. The curse of the old law was upon her, and the father's sins must be visited on the child.

Hubert had heard all; and he was forsaking her!

She had known it must be so — known it dimly and passively, as we think of death, the common doom of all. But to have the moment come so soon — to see him turn away without a word or look, smote her soul with a keen agony too mighty to be endured. She stretched out both arms towards his receding form with a wild, ringing cry, and then sank down on the sofa, crouching together as if convulsed with bodily pain.

"What is it? Helen, poor child!" said Mrs. Warner, striving to raise her bowed head.

"He is going — it is true — the story is true, and he is going to leave me," and she clasped Mrs. Warner's hands, and looked up piteously.

It was a very painful moment to that lady, but she thought it was better that the worst should be known at once, and so she answered in a kind but hesitating tone, —

"You must not wonder at it, Helen. If he believes the stories, he must feel that he cannot see you now. Perhaps it will be better for you both if you never meet again."

"Never meet again! O, can you mean so!" she spoke slowly, pleadingly, and her cold hands dropped like lead by her side. If she had rebelled, if she had been indignant, it would have been easier to reason with her, easier to remind her of the fatal barrier which had suddenly arisen to shut her out from all she had loved or hoped

for; but to see her thus was heartbreaking; and Mrs. Warner wept as she said, —

"Do not think about *that* now, and do not blame us, Helen. We will try to do right; but it is dreadful for us all, and hard to know what to do."

"I don't blame you," Helen said, with something of her old manner, gently putting away Mrs. Warner's caressing hand. "I have no complaints to make. I don't wonder that you scorn me — that you are ashamed of me. I scorn and despise myself." She wrung her hands, and added, passionately, "How can this be! It is too dreadful! How can I bear it! O, why cannot I die!"

"Hush, Helen, dear, hush! It is wrong to talk so."

"Wrong! it is *all* wrong! all one piece of wickedness! *I* the child of shame! *I* one of the servile race! O, horrible!" and shuddering, she buried her face in her hands.

"Don't talk so; don't!" said Mrs. Warner, making a faint attempt to comfort her. "It is a shocking thing to us all; but then you have many friends, who will always be interested in you, and it might have been a great deal worse for you."

"Worse! How? O, I know what you mean," she added, with a look before which the stereotyped consolation seemed to shrivel on the lips that spoke it, like parchment touched by fire. I know what you are thinking of. *I am a slave!* the child of a slave mother. Why don't they take me to market and sell me? They sold my

mother, and I am no better than she was. Why not treat us all alike?" And she laughed so wildly that Mrs. Warner feared she was losing her reason.

She was indeed nearly distracted; but when she saw the apprehension which her companion's face expressed, she made a great effort to be calm and quiet, and, in a tone far different from that she had just used, she begged to be told her mother's history, the details of which were yet unknown to her.

Mrs. Warner complied briefly, for the subject was disagreeable to her. . She was anxious to avoid wounding Helen's already lacerated heart, but she could not look upon the matter as Colonel Bell had done; she had no knowledge of Corilla's refined and delicate nature, which had redeemed her in the eyes of her lover from the infamy of her position, and she could not give the story the coloring he had given it. The unhappy girl felt while she listened, that notwithstanding her pity, Mrs. Warner looked upon her as even then sharing some portion of her mother's shame.

The garden was vacant at length, and Helen could reach her room unnoticed. She was thankful to be alone, and when she had fastened the door, she threw herself down upon the carpet, her face buried in her arms; and making no longer any effort at self-control, she lay moaning and writhing, while all the waves of misery and despair swept over her. It was not wholly for herself she mourned, though the heavy grief which crushed her might

well have made her selfish. From her childhood her brother had been her pride and her idol, and his happiness her first care; and now amid the horrors and darkness which surrounded her, his face came before her mental vision like the face of an accusing spirit, and again she heard Julie's gentle voice, urging her to remain with them. O, if she had but heeded their request! If she had but refused to return to her southern home, perhaps this miserable truth might never have been known, and they at least have been happy. How should she ever meet them? How could she ever endure to tell the secret of which they were now so unconscious?

Poor Helen! what years of agony she lived in that one day; alternately calm and passive with exhaustion, or restless, half frantic, and raving wildly with passionate struggles and tears, she wore away the long, long hours. Mrs. Warner came and went, urging food and rest; but such entreaties seemed a mockery; and, worn out at length by the contest between her pity and prejudice, which led her at one moment to long to give Helen the only comfort that could be bestowed, by assuring her she should be held by them in the same light as before this discovery, and the next moment made her repel that idea as something impossible, she was almost glad when at nightfall Helen requested that she might be left alone until morning.

Hubert also had passed the day alone, in a frame of mind hardly more endurable than that of his unfortunate

betrothed. It is rarely that a man's love is capable of the generosity and self-forgetfulness which characterize a woman's, even though the emotion itself be as intense in one heart as in the other. The idiosyncrasies of different characters of course modify this distinction; and there are selfish and heartless women, as there are men, who have

> "Esteemed the world well lost — and all for love."

But when a man has lived thirty-five years, as Hubert had, before experiencing a sincere passion, he is perhaps less likely to be carried away by enthusiasm, and careless of the world's opinion, than he could be if long habit had not led him to consider that opinion as an irrevocable sentence, from which there is no appeal.

But the strong love with which Helen had inspired him wrestled with all the habits of his thought, and the education of a lifetime, now armed and fighting against it. Until the last moment he had refused to believe she could be one of the race whom from infancy he had looked upon as created only for the use or amusement of their lordly superiors.

He had risked something to aid Michel; he had been uniformly kind to his father's servants, and was beloved by them; but it had all proceeded from the disposition that made him once shelter a terrified pig, which the dogs were worrying, and feed those same dogs, and pet them, when they fawned upon him. Perhaps he had never

once, even in thought, admitted the colored raco to a humanity equal with his own. But Colonel Bell's appearance, and the clear and simple proofs of the truth of his story, agreeing as they did with what Helen had previously told him of herself, forced him at length to yield; and then came the question, the struggle, that racked his very soul. To marry her seemed impossible; to give her up, and with her all his dreams of bliss, seemed equally impossible. His hesitation and doubt were pitiable, and generosity and affection sometimes shrank, convulsed and trembling, within the serpent coils which prejudice had wound about his soul.

As he walked the room thus perturbed and excited, he heard some one rap at his door, and, when he had opened it, his father entered.

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

"Être éternal, rassemble autour de moi l'innombrable foule de mes semblables; qu'ils écoutent mes confessions, qu'ils gémissent de mes indignités, qu'ils rougissent de mes misères! Que chacun d'eux découvre à son tour son cœur au pied de ton trône, avec le même sincérité, et puis qu'un seul te dise, s'il l'ose, *je fus meilleur que cet homme là.*" — ROUSSEAU.

MR. WARNER met his son's inquiring glance with an air of embarrassment, and took one or two turns across the room, before he could find words to say. Then he only uttered the commonplace phrase, "I'm sorry for you, Hubert; this is sad business."

"Sad!" ejaculated Hubert, with secret impatience, which he tried to conceal under his habitual calmness of manner.

"You must try to bear it like a man," Mr. Warner added.

"I do; don't I?" said Hubert, irritated by this well-meant attempt at consolation. His wound was too sensitive to endure handling.

"I hope you will. You will suffer at first, of course; but it is all in a lifetime. We get over every thing, if we live long enough."

"I think I heard you give the same consolation to

Angie the other day, sir, when her kitten died," said Hubert, frowning slightly.

"Don't think I am unfeeling, my son," replied Mr. Warner, coloring a little at this remark. "If I tell you the same things to-day, it is only because these common sayings come to one's lips when one don't know what else to say. I'm sure I don't know what to say to you now."

The old man's voice trembled, and Hubert, repenting of his irritability, said, more kindly, —

"I know you feel badly, father, but you must excuse me. There are things about which a man don't want to be condoled with."

"But Hubert, I must say one thing; I shouldn't have intruded upon you only for that." He paused, hesitated, and then added, "You won't forget yourself, and do any thing rash — you won't feel yourself now bound by obligations you assumed under a totally different state of things?"

He spoke interrogatively; but Hubert made no reply, and in a few moments he continued, with increasing embarrassment, —

"Of course it was well enough for you to tell her that you would never give her up; it may be as well to let her think so till she gets back to her brother, or wherever Colonel Bell may see fit to send her; for I suppose he will take charge of her now. But then you can't seriously mean it?"

"It is no matter how many lies I tell her now, I sup-

pose, since she is discovered to be only about seven eighths white," said Hubert, mockingly.

"Hem! ha! why, I don't mean that, of course," replied his father; "but you can't possibly marry her now."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, it is against the law of the state — "

"Law! O, yes, nice laws they are," interrupted Hubert, "but more honored sometimes in the breach than in the observance."

"What do you mean? You are wild, boy," said Mr. Warner, beginning to be alarmed. "Beware how you scorn my advice. I only seek your good, and you are too much excited now to know exactly what you ought to do. You may do something you will be sorry for."

"Very likely I shall," said Hubert; "it won't be the first time, if I do."

"Don't be rash, my son. *Don't* throw away your reputation, and disgrace your family, for the sake of a headlong fancy you will regret by and by."

"I am not apt to be Quixotish; I think I shall keep cool," Hubert answered. But the next moment, he turned around so fiercely that his father was startled, exclaiming, "I don't believe one single word of this story; it is all a lie — an infernal lie; and I'll call out Colonel Bell, and make him pay for it with his blood."

"You won't help the matter any, if you do," replied his father. "The report came from his wife, and I believe she has taken pains to spread it every where."

"She is a Jezebel," said Hubert, vehemently.

"No matter for that; people will believe her; and now the story must be generally known, and you could never marry any body who was even *suspected* to be tainted with negro blood. Think of the disgrace it would cast upon your brothers and sisters, and what all the world would say about it! They would think you either crazy or a fool, and you would be ashamed of it yourself by and by. No, no, Hubert; be ruled by us for once, and go away somewhere until we have settled this business. It is bad enough as it is, and will only be harder to manage, if you meddle with it. You are no longer a boy, and you ought to have sense enough to help you bear your disappointment, and be thankful you discovered the secret when you did. How do you suppose you should have felt, if, after you had been married a few years, you had found out your wife was partly a negro?"

"Father," exclaimed Hubert, growing very pale, "it is my opinion that the less we talk on the subject, the better it will be for us. I have my own thoughts, and I shall do as I think best. If you would like to stay here, you are welcome to use my chamber as long as you wish. *I* am going to take a walk;" and, making a low bow, he took his hat, and went out.

Helen had been an hour or two alone that evening. She had heard the children's voices, as they passed her door, hushed to a low whisper, for they had been told she was ill; and then their merry laughter and prattle in the

nursery at the end of the hall, as they were being undressed. Then the servant's steps and voice died away, and the house became still, except the sound of an occasional word, or the shutting of a door in the distance, and the low murmur of conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Warner, in the parlor beneath her chamber.

A small lamp burned on her table, and she stood reading by its light a tiny note, which she had just discovered on the sill of her door. It contained these words: —

"Beloved Helen, — dearer now than ever, — meet me in my sanctum at the end of the piazza, at eight o'clock. I shall wait for you, and by your love I conjure you, do not disappoint me."

No name was signed, but she knew too well who traced those lines, and she pressed them to her lips, and blessed him. She knew also the place to which he referred. It was on the same floor with her own chamber, and she could easily reach it by going around the house on the upper piazza, which extended along the wing of the building, at the extreme end of which a small room had been appropriated to Hubert's sole use, as a smoking room, and place of deposit for his guns and fishing rods, and his few books and papers.

It was a whim of his to choose this place for them, since he declared that when they were kept in his chamber, he could never find any thing where he left it, in consequence of the inveterate propensity his mother and the maids had for sweeping and dusting. Into this bach-

elor's den, however, no servant was allowed to enter, and he was permitted to keep it in as untidy a condition as he pleased.

Helen hesitated a few moments after reading the note. She had been compelling herself to look calmly at her desolate state, and consider how she should meet its trials. She was not of a meek and quiet temper. Had she been possessed of less good sense, or less thoroughly learned to control herself, hers would have been rather a turbulent and stormy nature; and as it was, she had quick, sensitive feelings, easily aroused, and not so easily quelled, great dignity of character, and something of the aristocratic pride belonging to her father's family. But she was generous, warm-hearted, and full of delicate sensibility; and though she had seen much of the world, she had not adopted its selfish maxims, or believed in its philosophy. Never for one moment doubting Hubert's faith and love, clinging to those brave words, "I will never give you up," as her only safeguard from insanity, she could yet see that his mother was right, and it was best they should never meet again. Never should he have cause to blush for the wife of his bosom. Never should child of his share the shame which she inherited. Never should he for her sake be an outcast from his family, and face the sneers of the world. And O, more than all, never should he, in any future time, regret that his noble heart had been offered to one whose narrow gaze could not take in the future, in which she might be a blight and

a mildew on all his hopes and aspirations. Better a lonely life for them both; better that he should forget her than that this should be.

She had resolved to arrange with Mrs. Warner that she might be sent to the cars the next day, without his knowledge; for the very bitterness of shame which she endured at the thought of herself, made her more than ever unwilling to accept the aid Colonel Bell had offered, and she longed to go where none would know her, and no eye could mark her sorrow. But those few simple words unnerved her resolution, and filled all her soul with a resistless yearning to see him, to hear his voice once more, to be clasped in his arms again, — and then to die.

She looked at her watch. It was a little past the hour. The note had been there some time before she saw it. She approached the window, opened the shutters, and, trembling in every limb, stepped out into the moonlight, and then with slow, hesitating footsteps, uncertain if she was doing right, she walked to the corner of the piazza. The moment she reached it, she saw Hubert standing in the angle of the buildings, a few feet distant.

"I knew you would come; I knew you *could not* refuse me," he said, and held out both arms as he came towards her. Cold, agitated, fainting, she fell upon his breast. O the mingled rapture and anguish of that moment, and the long, long embrace which followed, wherein Hubert carried rather than led her along, until they had reached

his sanctum, and were seated together on the sofa, which was the sole resting-place its confined limits afforded.

His arms were around her, her aching, tear-worn head rested on his shoulder, and his lips, hovering over hers, murmured low words of fondness that fell on her heart like balm. For a little while she gave herself up to this blissful time of quiet repose, between the storm which had wrecked her hopes and the tempest whose waves would overwhelm her when she had parted from him forever; and from the very excess of her love and gratitude, her soul grew strong for the sacrifice she contemplated.

"It is happiness, it is bliss to be here, but it is for the last, last time," she said, with mournful calmness, as she raised herself at length from her resting-place.

"The last time! O, no," he answered. "Have we not tried living apart, and found it impossible? What a day this has been — to me! Has it not been long and terrible to you?"

She shuddered, and sighed deeply, but could not speak.

"I am afraid you wondered why I did not come to you," he continued; "but they insisted I should not."

"They were right: and yet I could not deny you this last interview, though it may be improper. I could not deny myself the pleasure of telling you once more how I blessed you for your affection, and what a comfort and support its memory would be to me when we were separated."

"Why do you talk so, Helen? Can you live without me? Can we live apart?"

"We *must*, Hubert."

"We *must not*. I *will* not give you up."

Her voice and manner had a dreary calmness, but his was tremulous and excited, and, as he spoke, he drew her head down to its place on his shoulder."

She yielded a moment, and then rising, she gently and with a dignity that enforced obedience, removed herself from his arms.

"Hear me," she said, gently. "We must meet no more. To-morrow I shall leave this house, and you must not follow me. Through the few short days that may remain to me in the world, I shall live upon the thought of your noble and generous love; I shall bless you for it; I shall remember it night and day. I don't know where my days may be spent, or what will become of me; but I believe I am doing now the only thing that can give them peace, since thus you will never blush for the woman you have loved."

"You are determined, then! And I,— what am I to do?" he asked, almost sullenly.

"I do not tell you to forget me," she answered, in quivering tones; "but O, if you cannot otherwise be happy, it were better that you should."

"*You* say so,— *you!* And you pretend to have loved me!"

She could not bear this sharp reproof.

"Love you!" she exclaimed; "you never knew, you never thought how much. But, loving you thus, can I consent you should sacrifice your family, your friends, all your prospects in life, and brave the frowns of the world for me? For I know how it will be. I know how the world looks on such as I am, — cursed from my birth! No; never shall you sacrifice yourself to marry me."

Hubert drew nearer to her, and there was a gloomy fire in his eyes, as he grasped her hand, with a strong pressure.

"Helen," he said, in a low voice, "suppose that had not been, and I had a home, a fairy-like home, by the side of a silver lake, embowered in trees, in a land where it is always summer, and the skies are serene as our lives would be; suppose you lived there, and I was with you most of the time, but present or absent, ever true to you, living only for you, our brief separations only making our meetings more full of joy; suppose you lived there, with books, and flowers, and birds, — could you be content, even though you seldom saw any neighbor, or had any company except mine?"

"Why do you ask me this? Why do you picture happiness that can never be ours?" she answered, half fearfully.

"Because, O Helen, let us fly together to some such home, and forget this miserable world, that turns its back on you."

She shook her head with a faint, sad smile.

"You must not talk so," she said. "This is no time

to unnerve our souls with dreams. Even in the home you picture, we should hear the voice of this same scornful world; you would hear it; and perhaps you might repent."

He shrank from the clear light of her eyes, for he was secretly conscious of a hesitation and dread which, even in that moment of excitement, was not wholly forgotten. He blushed to own it to himself, but he felt it, nevertheless, and his voice was fainter, as he replied, —

"But what can you do, Helen, if you will not let me protect you? Your education, your accomplishments, can no longer find you a support, and you will be self-dependent, unless you consent to receive the aid you rejected this morning from Colonel Bell. What can you do? I shudder when I look to the future. O Helen, we have loved so well; you are my soul's idol; why must we part?"

But she felt the hesitation — the dread. Through all his anxious protestations of love, her sensitive nature recognized the jarring of that weakness in his soul, and she said, still more coldly and sadly, "Poverty, destitution, the lowliest lot to which fate may bring me, would be as nothing in comparison with the fear that you might regret the sacrifices you must endure to make me your wife. O Hubert, dare you tell me even now that you would not blush to have it known you married me? — that you do not at this moment hesitate between love and pride?"

She withdrew her hand from his as she spoke; and as

her piercing gaze met his, he colored, and half turned his head from her. She could not know all the thoughts that struggled in his soul, but she was not mistaken in the intuition which had revealed to her what he dared not speak, and her proud soul was roused and stung almost to madness.

"You dared to ask if I loved you," she exclaimed, rising suddenly, and standing before him; "you, who have never known a love so strong that it could bear self-sacrifice. Do not speak; I saw your thoughts in your face. O, I never imagined, when I used to study its varying expression, that the day would come when I should read there any scorn of me. I needed only this to show me I have indeed fallen low."

"Helen, you mistake; you judge me harshly; you do not read me aright," he cried, in shame and anguish. "I love you — love you dearly."

"Love me! yes, but how?" she answered, bitterly. "O, why did I come here only to discover this — to lose the last comfort left me in believing you stronger, better, more noble than those who will pursue me with cold pity and feeble sympathy, harder to bear than scorn? Why did you send for me? Had you not been all day balancing between your compassion for me, and the worldly policy that made your mother say it was best we should never meet again?"

Her words were too true; and when she paused, inquiringly, the denial he would have spoken faltered on his

tongue. Yet he threw himself on his knees at her feet, and tears no bodily torture could have wrung from him dimmed his eyes.

"I never meant you should know it," he said, humbly and fervently; "but since you force me to confess it, will you be implacable, and deny me any pity or forgiveness? I can never cease to love you. Helen, my heart is bleeding now, and torn with grief. O, such a miserable day as this has been! Consider in what a channel my thoughts and feelings have run from childhood, and do not hate me. If we must part, at least let us part in peace."

"Part — yes, it is time we parted," said Helen, wildly, pressing her clasped hands on her heart, with a frantic gesture. "I do not hate you; O, no, no! that can never be! But it is as Colonel Bell told me — you cannot rise above the prejudices of your class — and this is no place for me. Farewell, Hubert! farewell forever!"

She was gone. He caught at her dress, but she drew it from his hand as she vanished. He called her name; she heard him, but answered not, and fled in breathless haste to her chamber.

Yet, once there, alone and in safety, she repented. O, strange — woman's heart! she repented that she had left him with those last words. The love, the passionate worship she had cherished for so many months, rose up in wild rebellion against the fate which had overthrown its idol. His kneeling figure, his features distressed and ghastly in the pale moonlight, his beseeching gesture,

came before her mental vision, and she could pardon the selfishness she had so angrily resented.

She longed, with intense yearnings, to return to him, to comfort him; nay, in that moment of insanity, with her reeling brain and her fainting heart, she longed to fly with him, and forget the world and the miseries with which it menaced her.

Then came a swift reaction of feeling and thought, that made her cry out for human help and sympathy. The loneliness of her quiet room oppressed instead of soothing; and she glanced around with a restless pining to hear some voice speaking words of comfort, to throw herself upon some strong arm, which could shield her from herself and Hubert; and more than all, to escape to some spot where she should never again see him who had so cruelly disappointed her confidence in his love.

At that moment, for the first time recollected, came the gentle, warning voice of Mrs. Avenel, and her earnest manner, as she said, "I will always be your friend. If sorrow comes upon you, remember this, and come to me."

"I will go; this very night I will go. The roof that shelters Hubert is now no place for me. God only knows what I shall do; but I cannot remain any longer alone, for my brain is growing wild."

Thus Helen said to herself; and without pausing to think of the distance or the hour, she threw a light shawl over her head, and going along the piazza, in an opposite direction to that she had before traversed, she came to a

flight of steps which led to the ground. None heard her light step as she flitted past the windows. None saw her as she stole away amid the shadows. The air was balmy and still, and the moonlight fell over the landscape, clear and calm, like a soft white hand, laid gently upon the feverish heart of earth, to hush its throbbings. But the hush and repose of nature had no power to soothe the loud tumult of despair and apprehension which quickened Helen's steps to breathless haste.

The two houses were not more than four miles apart, and she had sometimes walked the distance; but now she ran, she flew; an invisible power seemed upholding and urging her forward, without rest or pause. She met no white person on the lonely road, and the few negroes who were strolling about hid themselves, quaking with fear, in the dim shadows of the huge old pines, and told afterwards, with distended eyes and suppressed breath, how, on such a night, a ghost had glided swiftly by them, along the sandy road.

It was late in the evening; but Mrs. Avenel had been reading, as she sat alone in the old-fashioned square parlor, where once at this hour she had not been alone — where once she had looked up from her book to meet kind eyes gazing fondly on her, to hear many a childish question, to sympathize with many a youthful feeling, and to feel herself the centre of the home which was then so happy.

Where were they now — all those, who were wont to gather in social converse around that table, whence now the lamplight cast her shadow lonely on the wall? Alas! they were dead, or distant, or — bitterest of all to realize — unloving and estranged from her, the widowed mother of an only child.

But she had become accustomed to her loneliness, and habit attached her to the spot where she had known much joy and no little grief; and she led a dreamy life; the monotony of which was not unpleasing to her sensitive and somewhat feeble organization.

Closing her book at length, she arose and went to the window. The vines, clustering over the latticed piazza, glistened in the radiance that pictured their airy tremble in masses of light and shade upon the floor, and made the white sands of the avenue look like snow, as it stretched away between its dark lines of trees. She was about to close the shutters and fasten them, when she perceived something which caused her to look more earnestly, and pass her hand across her eyes to satisfy herself she was not dreaming.

Even while she looked it drew nearer — a rapidly-moving yet staggering, tottering figure, that waved to and fro with wild, uplifted arms, and hair falling like a black veil over the light dress which fluttered as it sped onward.

"Heaven preserve us! what is this?" said Mrs. Avenel; and she stood divided between curiosity and fear.

On it came, struggling, panting, as one in the last throes of exhaustion, yet never pausing until it was near — was opposite the spot where she stood spell-bound ; and then it seemed to see her. The arms were reached out towards her, the colorless face was turned to her ; a voice so changed, so agonized, that she did not recognize it, cried out, "O Mrs. Avenel, save me ! save me !" and Helen Dupré fell senseless on the steps she was trying to ascend. Startled and shocked as she was, Mrs. Avenel instantly divined all that could be told, and sprang forward to aid her friend. She put aside the shrouding hair, and raised her face, speaking kind and tender words to recall her senses, for she dreaded to let any of the servants see her in this condition. But her desperate flight had drawn too powerfully on the springs of life. With the first gasp of breath came a choking, gurgling sound, and a dark stream of blood flowed over her pallid lips.

CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

"Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine —
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed about with fairy flowers;
And all those flowers were mine.

"Ah, dream too bright to last!
O starry hope, that did arise
But to be overcast!
A voice from out the Future cries,
'On! on!' — but o'er the Past,
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies,
Mute, motionless, aghast!"

Colonel Bell had expected mortification and suffering in making his confession, and in witnessing its effects upon those who heard it; and he had nerved himself to endure calmly and manfully this penance for the sins of his youth. But he was himself unaware how strong was the hold which Helen had taken of his heart, or how acute would be the pain of seeing her utterly prostrated, and writhing beneath the blow his hand was compelled to give; and still less was he prepared to see her turn with anger and contempt from the protection and love he offered her, and which he had for a few hours dared to hope would ultimately bring her consolation, and be to him a means of peace and happiness, such as he had not

enjoyed for years. Intense, almost unendurable, was the chagrin with which he had left her alone in her sorrow. He had gone thither in his carriage, intending to bring her away with him, and carry her to the little cottage where his happiest days were spent, until he could prepare a better asylum; and then, if, as he expected, Hubert Warner shrank from making her his bride, he meant to cross the ocean with her, and establishing himself there, make her the idol of his declining years.

Vain dreams! His bitterest enemy could have wished him no more torture than the desolate disappointment with which he sank back on the cushions, and gave the order to drive homeward.

Clara was watching for his return with a degree of anxiety that, had it been less selfish, might have passed for sympathy. If he did not discover that she had dared reveal his secret, if the Warners did not know from whom the report proceeded, she could laugh at Fate and take courage. But he proceeded through the garden directly to the library, and locking himself in, gave orders that he should be disturbed by no one.

He did not come out to dinner, and she grew fearful and troubled; but when the tea hour came, he joined her for a few moments, and though he made no reference to Helen, and was very pale and quiet, he seemed more sad than stern, and she began to hope again.

After tea he retired immediately. Lights were burning

on the library table, and it was covered with papers, as if he had been examining and arranging accounts, preparatory to leaving home. He glanced at them with a wearied air, as he took his seat again before them, and after a few moments of thought, pushed them in a heap together away from him, and, taking a sheet of paper, commenced writing — commenced and recommenced, wrote and rewrote, often tearing up and throwing away what seemed nearly finished. But at length he seemed hopeless of satisfying himself, and dashed rapidly along until a sheet was covered, and he leaned back in his chair to read what he had written. It was as follows:

"Helen — child of the lost Corilla — *my* child — I have covered a dozen sheets of paper in trying to tell you what *she was to me*, and what *you are*. But words are vain; or perhaps I can talk better than I can write; for the written words seem cold and tame, but when I speak them, when I call your name with words of endearment, here in my solitary room, they burn on my lips like fire. O Helen, I am a miserable man. Your mother was my wife by a spiritual and holy marriage which her own pure nature sanctified, and her early death redeemed forever from being classed in my thoughts with common and vulgar connections of the kind. I know what I say may shock you; it is well it should; but I must say it, to explain why I have cared so fondly for you and your brother, and tried so hard to raise you above the disabilities of your birth. Your mother was pure. I only was sinful

and false. It was this I meant when I said I wronged her. Do you call this sophistry? Perhaps it is, but I cannot endure the memory of your last scornful look. I must redeem myself in your eyes; I must redeem *her*. The proud woman who now bears my name is not worthy to be her successor.

"Helen, you must love me. I know not what unnatural hate possesses you, to turn from me as you did this morning. Have you been with me so much this summer, and yet never felt the strong magnetism of affection, that should have attracted you to me? never known why I watched you so closely, and rejoiced in your beauty and happiness, or been conscious of the thousand times when I have longed to take you in my arms and bless you? Helen, you *must* love me.

"I suppose by this time they have told you all the details I had told them; or perhaps you overheard *all*, instead of part of my story. I have been trying to tell it over again, but I cannot write it. You must hear it from my own lips. When shall I come to you? O, how my heart yearns for you! You spurned my love this morning, but it must be that after so many hours of thought you have grown calmer, and can appreciate my reasons for not sooner manifesting an interest in you. You must see now that my silence, my apparent desertion, was but a proof that I loved you with a true, unselfish affection, which was willing to deny itself for the good of its object. It may be, poor child, that by this time you

see also some other loves forsaking you! some other friendship failing! O, if it be so, come to my heart, and find there a wealth of love which shall never cease. I entreat you, let me protect you. Let me assume a father's right over you, and be your support and comfort. I am so humbled, so crushed in spirit, that I dare not insist upon this, unless you give me permission; but with my whole soul I beg it of you, as a man dying of thirst would beg for water. Do not scorn my prayer. Do not hate me for the unintentional evil I have caused you.

"O Helen, you may have thought me a quiet and stern man. I know I seem so. I know I am called cold hearted. I do not wonder that people thus regard me, for I am cold to most; stern, perhaps, to some. But it seems to me sometimes that the very hardness of the crust which years have gathered over my heart, layer by layer, thickening and hardening, has only kept the delicate fibre within more sensitive than that which beats in the breasts of other men. If you could know how it thrills and aches to think of the words you spoke this morning, you would recall them, and allow me to hope that you will one day learn to love me.

"May I come and see you? O my child, if others forsake you, we two will be all the world to each other. We will go to foreign lands, where these heathenish prejudices are not rife, and men will not sneer at you for the rich darkness of your cheek. You and your brother and I! How happy we might be together! I am weary

of a house full of ill nature and strife, and long for peace and quiet. My only hope is in you. Can you not pity me?"

He had written thus far, when he read it over; and again he proceeded.

"I have been reading this letter; and how cold and languid it seems in comparison with the warm emotion of my soul! It is incoherent, too, but it may be that will only convince you how much I am in earnest. If you will let me protect you, if you will bless me with your love, send me word, that I may come to you. But if, when you have read this, it awakens no emotion of affection, if you still turn from me in proud disdain, I pray you send me no message, no word. I could not bear another syllable of unkindness from you. It would break my heart. In that case, I shall provide for your temporal wants as it becomes a father to do for his child, but I will never attempt to see you again. You cannot annul my obligations to you, though you may deny me the sweet and tender recompense of filial love."

He signed the letter, and folded it; then, placing it in an envelope, directed and sealed it. Weary, yet hopeful, he sank back in his chair. "Surely this will move her," he said to himself. "I have seen her quick sympathies so often aroused by far less than this. Now that the first stunning shock has passed, she cannot fail to pity me."

A dreamy revery succeeded, from which he awoke at length to realize the lateness of the hour, and that he did

not sleep any the previous night. He rang the bell, and a servant entered, to whom he said, —

"Here is a letter which I wish you to take to Mr. Warner's to-morrow morning. I am fatigued, and may sleep late; but you will be on your way so early as to be there by the time the family are at breakfast. The letter is to Miss Dupré, a young lady who lives there, and you must be sure she receives it, for it is of great importance."

"Shall I wait for an answer, massa?"

"Yes, certainly; that is, I expect she will return an answer, and you must not come away until you are certain there is none to be sent."

The servant took the letter, bowing respectfully, and was about to withdraw, when his master called him back.

"Stay," he said. "I think the letter is safest here until morning. You may lose it if you carry it with you. I will lock it in the table drawer, and lay the key here on my desk, behind this book. Do you see?"

"Yes, massa; nobody can't steal him there."

"You will know where to find it; and I hope you will be able to return so as to give me an answer when I awake."

"Trust me, massa; I'll hurry," said the servant, and went out, followed in a little while by his master, who extinguished the lights with his own hand, and turned the key in the lock, as he shut the door, and with a slow, thoughtful step retired to his own room.

Hardly had the glimmer of the candle he carried dis-

appeared in the darkness of the long hall, than the door of the closet adjoining the library was silently pushed open, and a form so muffled in dark robes as to be indistinguishable amid the shadows, felt its way slowly up the stairs, and along the walls, until the door of Mrs. Bell's boudoir was reached; and, opening it cautiously, the figure entered. It was Marise.

Mrs. Bell was reclining by the open window, half asleep on the silken cushions of her lounge; but at her maid's entrance she started up, exclaiming languidly, —

"Well, what now?"

"He has gone to bed," replied the girl; "and I declare I am glad of it, for I am tired to death watching through that little hole. I don't wonder your back has been most broken sometimes, Miss Clara."

"It is inconvenient, but it was the best we could do," said her mistress; "and it has served some good purposes for you and me. I think now we are pretty sure of leaving this hateful place; and you, my good Marise, shall see the *garçon* who was so in love with you at Aix three years ago — if he hasn't forgotten you."

"There's plenty more if he has, I reckon," replied the girl, with a toss of her head.

"But have you nothing to tell me?" asked Mrs. Bell. "Has he been doing nothing all this evening? I wish that closet was where we could get at it in the daytime."

"He's been writing a letter, that he took a powerful

heap of pains about, and Jim is to carry it to Mr. Warner's to-morrow."

"Ha! Marise, I must see that letter."

"It is easy enough to get, by and by, when they are all safe asleep. He was going to give it to Jim, but he didn't. He locked it up in the table drawer, and put the key behind a book. I laughed to myself when he did; and says I, Them that sees things hid knows where to find 'em."

"True enough! It would have been difficult to get it if he had given it to Jim."

"Jim's hard to manage, but I'd made sure to get it some how. Wouldn't Colonel Bell kill me if he knew about that hole? I tremble when I'm there sometimes. I can see him so plain, it seems as if he must see me."

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Bell, carelessly.

"But 'spose he should go to the closet, some time, and find it out."

"He won't. He never goes there."

"All his fishing rods are laying there, and his guns."

"He never uses them, except when he has company to hunt or fish, and that hasn't been for these two years. He is getting too old to enjoy it, I suppose."

An hour later, when all the house was still, the same dusky figure, bearing a tiny taper, whose gleam looked like a glow-worm in the dark, might have been seen bending over the desk in the library, unlocking the drawer, and bearing away the letter which Colonel Bell had

thought so securely placed. He had some suspicion that his wife watched him, and he had known instances in which she had attempted to bribe his servants, who were generally faithful to him; but he had no idea how far her *espionage* extended, or to what a system it had been reduced.

Clara Bell took the letter from her servant, and after a long time, and careful painstaking, she succeeded in opening the envelope without breaking the seal. It was not the first time she had accomplished the same deed, but never before in the presence of a witness; and, as she looked up and met her servant's gaze, she was conscious of a faint sensation of shame.

"He is my husband, you know, after all, and I have a right to know his secrets," she said, apologizing, half to herself and half to her servant, for the meanness of her act. "I must know what is in the letter, or I cannot tell what he means to do with her. When I have read it I can seal it up again; so there will be no harm done."

"Law, Miss Clara! *I* wouldn't care. Don't he abuse you shamefully? I'd undermine him if I could," said Marise, who perceived that Mrs. Bell needed a little encouragement. She would have been surprised, and her mistress would have considered herself insulted, had any one asserted that she exerted a strong influence over one who seemed so much above her. But yet such is the power of evil association that much of the petty cruelty

and malice of which Clara Bell had been guilty, had been instigated and augmented by the sly and bold wickedness of this favorite maid.

As Clara read, her fair cheek reddened with excitement, and a fierce, exulting light dilated her blue eyes. Helen had scorned him then — had rejected his love with contempt. Ah, she knew too well how deeply that would wound him, for her experience had measured the sacrifice which his pride was willing to make to his affections. But when she came to the end, and saw the plans he had formed, she laid down the letter, and sat for a while in deep and perplexed thought.

"This letter must not be sent; it may spoil every thing if it gets to her," she said, at length, to Marise.

"Some letter must be sent," replied the girl: "that boy Jim would go through fire and water before he would leave doing any thing his master told him to."

"What can we do?" asked Mrs. Bell, pondering. "Ah, I have it! Instead of this, something must be sent to offend her — to widen the breach between them."

"If Miss Clara could write something to look like this writing," suggested Marise.

"I can't — you know I can't," said her mistress, shortly. "I could tell the difference myself, and if he should ever see it I should be ruined. I've got on nicely so far, and I won't spoil every thing by bungling with counterfeits now."

Again she read the letter, and it was with a feeling of

mingled pity and disdain that she held it forth to the candle and saw it curl and blaze, as it slowly consumed.

"Poor old fool!" she said; "if he had been a little less overbearing to me, I don't know but I should have let him have what comfort he could in that child of his. But it will never do now to let them make it up, and go away together — I should be more in his power than ever, and I was nothing but a slave before."

"Why, Miss Clara! 'pears like you was beginning to pity him," said Marise, who had overheard this soliloquy.

"I can afford to, child, for I see my way clear to triumph over him," replied the mistress; and the cold glitter returned to her eyes, and her lips grew white with the determined contraction of their muscles.

"What are you going to do? Somehow I feel uneasy, while that drawer is left open."

"I'll show you what I will do. Bring me the box from my dressing table."

The girl obeyed; and Clara, taking some bank notes from a secret drawer, placed one on a sheet of paper and the rest in her purse; then folding the note in the blank paper, she inserted it in the envelope, and dexterously sealing it with a little gum arabic, handed it to Marise with a triumphant flourish.

"Why, Miss Clara, I thought you was going to try to offend her!" said she, with an astonished air.

"So I am, you ninny. That will touch missy's pride; I can see her eyes flash now! She is as proud as Lucifer."

"What, sending her two hundred dollars? Lud! I wish somebody would try to make me mad that way."

"It wasn't two hundred dollars; it was twenty dollars. Don't you see what a mean thing it would seem to be in Colonel Bell to send her such a pittance as that, without any word of inquiry or explanation?"

"Lud! yes, indeed. Trust you for thinking of things! I thought it was more, or I'd have seen at once what you was up to."

"Well, take it now, and put it where you found it. I defy any body to tell that it has been meddled with. Be quick, Marise, and then come and undress me, for it is late, and I did not sleep well last night."

There seemed to be a spirit of unrest in the mansion apparently so silent that night. Colonel Bell turned and tossed on his bed, vainly striving to sleep. The gentle goddess was coy and hard to win; and when at last she touched his eyelids, she laid upon them the spell of frightful visions, from which he awoke with a struggle, and called impatiently upon Jim, who slept on the matting outside his chamber door.

"What is it, massa — daylight ain't come yet," said the boy, springing up at the first word, but rubbing his eyes to keep them open.

"No — I know it is not daylight — it wasn't for that I called you. I have had a dream, so vivid that I cannot compose myself, unless I know it is only a dream. I dreamed I saw somebody at my table, taking that letter

out of the drawer. Light a candle, and go see if it is there, and if so bring it to me."

The boy complied, secretly trembling at being sent alone through the empty rooms, in obedience to a warning conveyed in dreams, but too full of devotion to his master to allow him to discover his reluctance. Colonel Bell's apartments were in the wing of the building, at the end of which the library was built, so that he had but a few steps to go from the anteroom, where he slept, to the stairs which led to the library door. As he reached this place he fançied he heard a slight noise; and as he paused, he saw for one brief instant a spark, like a firefly, only larger and more brilliant, glimmer in the darkness below.

It was only an instant. He looked again, and all was silent and full of gloom. It might be that the light he held had dazzled his eyes, he thought, and, taking courage, went down to the library. All seemed exactly as his master had left it — the key behind the book, the letter in the drawer; and with glad heart he seized it, and hastened back without stopping to lock either drawer or door. Had he looked behind, as he rapidly ascended the stairs, he would have seen Marise, as, shrouded in her dark mantle, her noiseless footsteps guided by the light he held, she glided at safe distance behind him, and, when he had closed the door of his master's room, hastened on to relate her escape to her mistress. She had just locked the

library door when she saw the gleam of his candle, and in a breath extinguished her taper, whose small flame only illumined a few inches of the space around it, and slipped into the angle beneath the stairway.

"Did you find it?" asked Colonel Bell, anxiously, as Jim entered.

"Yes, massa — all right — here he is."

Colonel Bell took the letter from his hand, and after examining it, to assure himself it was the one to which he referred, placed it beneath his pillow, with a sigh of relief.

"I will never again be affected by a dream, since this proves untrue," he said, in a low tone, and then added, aloud, "You can lie down now and sleep, and at sunrise awake me, if you cannot get the letter in any other way."

Helen's hemorrhage had not been very severe, and the simple remedies which Mrs. Avenel knew how to apply had soon checked it; but the physician ordered entire rest and quiet, and there was little fear that his directions would be disobeyed. Utterly exhausted in body and mind, she lay motionless and almost lethargic on the bed where the affrighted servants had borne her at her friend's command, with scarce enough of life, or the power of thought, to realize what had occurred to bring her there, or why it was that at times the wish arose in her soul that she might never, never again return to strength or health.

Mrs. Avenel had spent the night beside her, and was going to her own room for a little repose, when she saw Colonel Bell's servant standing at the hall door. She stopped to accost him, and he gave her the letter, with a strict charge to deliver it into Helen's own hand.

"She is ill, and I think had better not be disturbed this morning," said Mrs. Avenel, hesitating.

"She must hab dat ar, miss, if she be sick. It ob de greatest importance, mass colonel say. I must make sure she hab it."

"Is there an answer requested?" she asked.

"He say he didn't zackly know; he 'spec so," replied the boy.

Still she hesitated; but Jim insisted upon the importance his master attached to the letter, and uncertain what she ought to do, but unwilling to risk Helen's welfare in any way, and hoping the letter might contain something that would be of comfort to her, she at length concluded to take it to Helen, and be guided by her wishes with regard to it.

"Helen, dear," she said, bending over the pale face that lay on the pillow, "here is a letter to you from Colonel Bell. Don't speak; it will hurt you; but press my hand, if you are willing I should open it and see what it contains. There may be something here which it would be well for you to know."

Helen gave the desired assent, and Mrs. Avenel broke the seal, and took from the envelope what seemed to be a

letter; but she could not restrain an exclamation of chagrin when, instead of the words of interest and cheer she expected to find, she saw only blank paper, and the bill for twenty dollars, which slipped out, and fell upon the bed.

"What can this mean?" she said, her gentle nature aroused to indignation, as she saw the faint flush which suffused the face of the sick girl. "If I had dreamed that *this* was what the envelope contained, you should never have seen it."

"Is there nothing else? Not a word?" said Helen's feeble voice.

"Nothing," replied her friend, examining the paper anew. "I should think it might be an imposition, only that I am certain this is the colonel's writing on the envelope. His style is peculiar, and could not be easily imitated. This is his seal, too. I don't understand it."

"Probably I offended him yesterday," said Helen.

"What did you say? But no, don't tell me now. You ought not to talk."

"I don't know what I said, but he evidently means to retaliate by this insult. I said something harsh, I remember."

"O, I can't think it. And yet Clara says he is a strange man. I was always a little afraid of him, and I think she is. Perhaps he might do it, if you offended him; and yet it is too cruel."

There was a pause, for Helen was too much prostrated

for violent feeling, and too weak to talk, and she closed her eyes, and turned away her head wearily. After too many blows, the heart as well as the body becomes benumbed.

Mrs. Avenel gathered up the paper and the money, and returning them to the envelope, was about to leave the room quietly, when Helen, hearing her move, opened her eyes, and beckoned her to return.

"Is the messenger waiting?" she whispered.

"He is."

Helen took the envelope from her hand, and with her trembling fingers, deliberately tore it, with its contents, into minute pieces, and gathering them together, gave them to Mrs. Avenel.

"Tell the boy to take these to his master," she said, faintly.

Mrs. Avenel nodded acquiescence, and glided away. She approved of returning this answer, but its decisive boldness was so foreign to her own timidity, that before she descended the stairs, she began to waver respecting its judiciousness, and to think it might be better for Helen not to do any thing further to provoke the anger of one who should naturally be her protector and friend. Therefore throwing the bits of paper out of the window, she told the boy that the message he brought required no answer, and he departed, eager to relieve his master's anxiety.

He found Colonel Bell lingering over a late breakfast in his own room.

"Wasn't I gone smart, massa?" he said, exultingly, as he entered.

The colonel smiled anxiously, and answered, "You have done well. I hope you bring some message."

The boy shook his head negatively. "No, mass colonel, Missis Avenel say dere ain't no answer."

"Mrs. Avenel! I told you to go to Mr. Warner's. You have made a mistake, you stupid boy."

"No, massa, I ain't made no 'stake. I went clar way to Mass Warner's, and when I get dere, I meets Missis Avenel's Josh, jest done come over to tell Miss Helen was over to his house. Dey was jest gettin' mighty scare over dere to know what had come ob her, for 'pears like she done lef' 'em mighty suddent; so den we race over dere togerer, and I sees Missis Avenel, and gives her de letter."

"What did she say?"

"She say Miss Helen sick, and fust 'pears like she didn't mean to give her no letter no how. But dey don't put dis chile off *dat way*, mass colonel. When I sticks, I sticks like a tumble bug, and dere ain't no gettin' red o' me. So I 'sisted 'pon it, till I made her go to Miss Helen's chamber."

"And they returned no answer!" said the colonel, growing very pale. "Was she long gone?"

"Yes, massa, mighty long time; when she come back, she say dere ain't no answer, and so I come away."

Colonel Bell arose suddenly from his chair, and walked to the window. Jim thought he heard a smothered groan, and when, a moment after, he turned to bid him leave the room, the affectionate boy was startled to see how haggard and care-worn he looked.

"I hopes, massa, I ain't done nothin'," he began to say, in an anxious tone; but the colonel interrupted him.

"Go," he said, waving his hand; "you have done well enough. Go."

The boy retired, full of alarm and curiosity; but he consoled himself by saying, "It's some o' missis' doin's. She's allers cuttin' up and plaguing massa;" and forthwith proceeded to the kitchen, to obtain his long-deferred breakfast.

Colonel Bell remained a long time alone, trying to overcome the shock of this bitter disappointment. In proportion as Helen rejected and shrank from him, his pity and love for her increased. He could in some sort appreciate the feeling with which he thought she regarded him, and have patience with it, and excuse it to himself. Irritable and impatient of opposition as he had often shown himself, his whole nature seemed changed when he thought of her, and he could no more have been angry with her, even then, than with the lost Corilla, whose image had been so long shrined in his heart's holy place. But when the absorbing hope of winning Helen's love had failed

him, his old enmity and dislike to his wife returned in full force, and called more loudly than ever for vengeance. His eyes flashed, and his teeth clinched together as he thought of her.

"Had she not wronged me enough before? Had she not made my home a hell?—that she must now go so much farther, and blight the fame and happiness of one who never injured her, simply to wreak the hatred she feels for me! Why should I spare her any longer? Did I not warn her what her fate would be, if in sheer malice she braved me thus? And now shall she be allowed to exult over my miserable failure, and mock me with her jeering laugh of triumph? Ah, Clara Bell! Clara Bell! you have reached the length of your chain: you shall rue the day you did this deed!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH.

> "Knowest thou the hate
> That maddens with its own intensity,
> And burns the heart worse than a living fire?
> Such is the passion set within my breast,
> Till I avenge her."
> "O, that human love
> Should be the root of this dread bitterness!"

Colonel Bell secluded himself in his library during all the day after his cruel disappointment with regard to the letter he had written his daughter. One of his overseers came upon some matters of business, and was admitted; but with this exception he did not allow himself to be seen by any one. Late in the afternoon he ordered his horse, telling Jim to have lights and tea ready in the library when he returned. Just as he was setting out, Clara returned from her daily drive, and as he passed slowly, their eyes met. She recoiled before the glance he gave her; but recollecting herself, she assumed an air of innocence, and beckoned him to stop. He checked his horse at the carriage window, and she asked, in the most musical tones, "Why do you keep so secluded? I have not seen you for two days."

"And you are anxious about me?—loving wife that you are."

She would not notice the sneer, but replied, "I should have been anxious, only I inquired and learned you were not ill."

"And yet I think I can remember the time when you could endure existence several days together without seeing me," he said, with a sardonic smile.

"But you have favored me with so much of your company lately, that I am quite lonely without you now."

"I commiserate your case, Mrs. Bell, and will try and procure you other company," he answered; and there was something ominous in his expression, which made her heart beat rapidly, while its scornful sullenness exasperated her.

"I hope it will be equally agreeable and amiable," she said, adding, in a low tone, "perhaps it may be some of your own family."

He caught the indistinct words, and his face flushed crimson. "Clara Bell," he said, sternly, "never dare allude to that again, as you love your life;" and spurring his horse, he dashed rapidly away.

It was nearly dusk when he arrived at Mrs. Avenel's. She saw him from the window of Helen's chamber, as he came up the avenue, and descended to the parlor to meet him. He entered with an agitated manner, and declining to sit down, said, in a low, embarrassed tone,—

"I have called to inquire for Miss Helen. My boy said she was ill at your house."

"She is quite ill; though the physician thinks she

only needs rest and freedom from excitement. The hemorrhage was not very severe."

"Was it so serious as that?" exclaimed he, — "a hemorrhage! Was it occasioned by excitement?"

"Partly, and partly by over exertion. She walked, or, rather, I should say she ran, the whole distance here, last night; she was nearly distracted. When she reached here she dropped down senseless, and for a little while I thought she was dying. O Colonel Bell, it is dreadful to see her suffer so much."

Mrs. Avenel had spoken with a cold dignity, and taken pleasure in thus punishing her hearer for his strange conduct in the morning; but when she saw him suddenly sink into a chair and bury his face in his hands, with a stifled moan, she became perplexed, and scarcely less agitated than himself. A few courageous words spoken then would have relieved him of much pain, but his companion was too nervous to ask for the explanation she longed to hear; and after a pause, he collected himself, and rising again, said calmly, —

"It is very sad — very dreadful. There are no words in which to speak of it. But, deserted as she evidently is by those to whom she clung most nearly, she rejects all my offers of kindness, and I cannot intrude further."

"But you could not expect an answer to the letter this morning," she ventured to say.

"Perhaps not," he answered sorrowfully; "and yet I did expect it. I thought she would accept my assistance.

I hoped for a word — a message; but she refused it. I deserve it, doubtless, and yet I hardly supposed her so proud. But it is useless to talk of it. Command me in any way you please for her. It will be my greatest pleasure to serve her, if she will allow it."

He waited a moment; but Mrs. Avenel was so much surprised and confused, that she did not know what to reply, and bowing courteously, he bade her good evening, and went away.

Returning home, he found the parlor lighted, and merry voices told that guests had unexpectedly arrived. He pleaded indisposition, and spent the evening alone. The next morning he arose early. As his valet was assisting him to dress, he learned that his wife's company intended making a visit of several days.

"That is fortunate; for I shall be absent for a week or two, and Mrs. Bell will not be lonely."

The valet was accustomed to these sudden departures, but he had so seldom heard Mrs. Bell's name from her husband's lips, that he opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Shall I go with you, sir?" he asked.

"No, I shall not require any servant; but I shall take Jim a little way along with me. Tell him to have horses ready when I have finished breakfast."

The order was obeyed, and when Colonel Bell descended to the hall door, he found Jim awaiting him, in a high state of self-gratulation, at the honor of being selected to accompany his master.

When they had ridden a mile or two at a rapi. the colonel checked his horse at a point where a path entered the main road, and calling Jim to his he said, impressively, —

"Do you know, Jim, why I have taken you with me this morning?"

"Dono, massa; 'thout 'pears like its kase you wanted company. Dese yer woods roads is lonesome," replied he, with an embarrassed grin.

His master smiled sadly at the simple vanity, and replied, "No, it was not for your company, valuable as that may be, but because I believe I can trust you, and I have something important for you to do.

The boy's eyes shone now, not with vanity, but with an honest pride in this praise, which was in truth well deserved.

"Trust me, massa!" he said, ducking his head with an attempt at an obeisance; "I'se all eyes and ears 'bout massa's business."

"Use your eyes, then, and notice the path we take, so that you could find it again without any mistake; for I may want you to come this way alone."

Colonel Bell rode forward as he said this, and Jim dropped into his place, a few yards behind. They went on, over level and hollow, keeping in a straight line, but not adhering closely to any of the varying paths which crossed their track. As they passed any conspicuous ob-

ject, a fallen or broken tree, or any thing else which would be easily recognized, his master turned a little and pointed to it, and Jim stored the image in his memory for future use. At length they reached another road, which seemed to run in an opposite direction from the one they had left a mile behind. Proceeding more rapidly now that they were clear of the underbrush, which had somewhat impeded their progress, they soon came to a spot where the road divided, with branches going in opposite directions, and the corner thus made was shaded by a large persimmon tree, now loaded with fruit. Beneath this tree the colonel paused, and as the boy came up, he said, —

"Here, Jim, is the end of your ride."

Jim's hitherto beaming face assumed an expression of blank disappointment; his importance seemed to have suddenly collapsed as these words met his ear, and staring about, he answered, a little sulkily, —

"What for massa want to fool dis chile? Bring him all dis way to get dese yer 'simmons. Plenty o' dem nigh by home."

"You foolish boy, you needn't pout. I am not fooling you: I have very grave business in hand, and I brought you here because I have tried you, and I find you can keep a secret, without asking any questions about it; and I don't know another fellow in the place that can."

Thus restored to his self-conceit, Jim's eyes and ears were on the alert to know what would come next, and he said, humbly, —

"Pardon, massa! I know I'se fool; but I'se been 'spectin' all along we was comin' to somewhere."

"And you call this nowhere?"

"Dis yer, dis am ony out in de woods, massa; I don't see nothin' else;" and he looked curiously around, for something in his master's manner aroused his attention.

"Exactly; we are in the woods, and this is all you will see. You remember I told you I selected you for this affair, because I didn't want any questions asked."

"Yes, massa," Jim replied, beginning to comprehend the significance of the compliments he had received.

"Listen, then, to what I say; and understand you are not to tell of it to any living being, either now or hereafter, and you are not to seek to find out any more than I choose to tell you. If you are careful, and follow my directions faithfully, I will reward you so that you will have cause to remember it all your life."

"Massa needn't be scare 'bout dis chile bein' faithful," said Jim, earnestly. "Dey won't get it out o' me — no, not if miss tell me she cut my tongue out if I don't."

"Did she ever tell you that?" asked the colonel, sternly.

"Yes, massa, yest'day; 'bout dat ar' letter; but I didn't tell nothin'."

Colonel Bell sat pale and thoughtful for some time, before he spoke again. Arousing himself at last, he continued his directions.

"You see this tree, and you have noticed the way we came here. Could you come again alone?"

"O, yes, massa — easy."

The colonel took from his vest pocket a three-cornered piece of paper, sealed and directed to himself, and gave it to the boy.

"Take this," he said, "and when you get home, put it in a place where no one can find it but yourself. Those ladies who are visiting your mistress will remain, I hear, until next Monday. If I come home before that time, you will have nothing further to do; but if I am still absent after they leave, you must watch your mistress ——"

"Ki! won't I?" exclaimed Jim, to whom this business was, for various reasons, quite agreeable.

Without heeding the interruption, Colonel Bell went on.

"The first time she goes out alone to visit her mother, and you are certain she intends being gone from home more than three hours, you take this note I have given you, and come as fast as possible to this place. Here you will find a person on horseback. You must say to him, 'Are you waiting for any thing?' and if he answers, 'Yes,' you may give him the note, and then go home again. This is all you have to do — except to control your curiosity."

By this time Jim's face was actually distended with inquisitive amazement. He understood what was required of him, but the mystery in which Colonel Bell had enveloped this little plot — seeming to trust him with a

matter of so much importance, and yet telling him nothing that could give him the least insight into it — stimulated his prying propensities to the utmost degree, and his master's concluding hint could hardly restrain the questions trembling on his tongue. He gulped them down, however, with a choking sound, as if the interrogation points stuck in his throat, and answered, submissively, —

"Yes, massa; but how's I gwine diskiver I cotched de right feller here? 'Pears like mos' any nigger settin' here on horseback 'ud say he's waitin'."

"I will take care of that," said Colonel Bell; "you have only to follow my directions, and I will assume the responsibility of failure. Are you sure you understand exactly what you have to do?"

"Yes, massa," replied Jim, turning the tri-cornered paper over and over in his hand; "I'se to bring you dis yer, any time Miss Clara drives out arter de company's gone."

"You have it in brief," said the colonel; and having repeated his commands, with additional charges to faithfulness and secrecy, he dismissed his servant, who rode slowly away, often looking back to where Colonel Bell sat, quiet as an equestrian statue, beneath the persimmon tree.

When he had been some time out of sight, Colonel Bell left the spot, and pursuing one of the roads, which seemed old and but little travelled, half an hour's ride

brought him to a high brick wall, at one corner of which stood a small and unpretending porter's lodge, beside a carriage door securely fastened. These were all which gave evidence of human habitation in that vicinity; for no house or plantation was visible for a circuit of miles through the forest, and the buildings inside the wall were completely hidden by the tall trees which grew around.

It was a pleasant, yet lonely spot. In the still sunshine, the insects hummed and chirped; the birds darted fearlessly about, busy, now that their days of love and song were over, in gormandizing upon ripe fruits and berries; occasionally, a rabbit, startled by some sudden noise, sprang over the rustling pine leaves carpeting the sand, to find a new hiding-place; or a covey of partridges rose whirring in their heavy flight to the low oak branches.

Colonel Bell looked thoughtfully upon the beauty and bounty of nature, and as he dismounted from his horse, and rang the bell, he sighed to think how it contrasted with the gloomy desolation of his own heart.

He was obliged to wait some moments before the door of the lodge was opened; and then, when he had made the necessary inquiries, and given his card to the servant, he was invited to enter and be seated for a little while; and the door communicating with the grounds shut with a spring lock behind the man, as he passed through to deliver the message.

Soon he returned, accompanied by a middle-aged gentleman, whose erect figure, and placid, benevolent counte-

nance, at once spoke kindness and dignity. At first one would have noticed only the gentle and amiable expression of his face; but a closer examination revealed lines of power and firmness around the lips, and an irresistible magnetism in the gaze of the full, dark eyes.

Now, however, those eyes expressed only welcome, and a slight surprise, which deepened into anxiety, as he noticed the worn and dejected aspect wherewith Colonel Bell arose to meet him. They were evidently old friends, for a cordial greeting took place, and then the new comer said, —

"You may have wondered at being compelled to remain here until your card could be sent to me; but it is against our rules to allow any one to pass this inner door without my permission, and we are obliged to be impartial in enforcing the order."

"I suppose so. I remember I waited here once before to see you, some years ago. How I pitied you then for the life you had chosen; and yet this isolation from the world cannot have been so irksome as I supposed, for you have changed very little. I have more 'crows' feet' than you, my dear doctor."

The two gentlemen stood looking at each other for a minute, and then the doctor replied, with a thoughtful smile, —

"I cannot believe it is ten years since I last saw you. Isolated as we are here, you perceive we have not been driven to conjugating the verb *s'ennuyer*, for time has

sped so swiftly, it seems but yesterday since I parted with you on this spot — I to return to the absorbing duties of my profession, and you to roam over the world after pleasure, with your bride, the beautiful Clara Avenel. Really I have been very ungallant not to have inquired for her. I hope she is well."

"It is of her I came to speak with you. Can I see you in private?"

An expression so fierce and painful appeared on the colonel's features as he uttered these words, that his friend, growing alarmed, hastened to lead him into the park, where a small office stood a few rods distant from the gate; into which they entered, and, closing the door, remained an hour in conversation.

When they appeared again, both wore a meditative air, and Colonel Bell was much agitated. Pausing on the doorstep, the doctor said, as if in reply to some question, —

"No, I do not think it unjust, and though severe, it is perhaps the best thing left for you now. Faithless! Malicious! My poor friend, you must allow me to pity you!"

"You may well do so," replied he. "On all God's earth there walks not a more miserable man than myself. Truly,

'Our pleasant vices are made whips to scourge us;'

and no matter how long we may skulk the flogging, it

must come at last. I begin to believe in Shakspeare — and the Catechism."

A pause ensued, during which they walked to the entrance of the lodge. As they reached it, the doctor said, —

"This conversation was of course necessary; but I must forget it from the moment she enters here, and regard her only as a singular case of monomania; and seriously," he added, "I am not certain that a mind so warped and distorted can be called perfectly sane. There is 'method in the madness,' to be sure, but it is hard to tell where lies the dividing line beyond which reason reels. You will be here again on Monday?"

"I will; and I think it will not be many days before we receive the message I spoke of. I preferred the plan I have detailed, as I think it will accomplish our object with less difficulty than any other; and also because I wish to keep the matter quiet, and to have none of my servants discover their mistress's retreat, for a few weeks, lest some rumor should reach Mrs. Avenel before I have time to prepare her to realize that her daughter is — insane."

"That is important, and I agree with you in wishing to keep as quiet as possible about this affair. It may be right for a man to do certain things, which it would not be wise for him to talk about."

"I think I can satisfy the few inquiries that will be made," said Colonel Bell, "and I have no scruples of

conscience on this point. Punishment for wrong doing and prevention of further evil cannot be a sin, for it is part of the economy of religion and nature. I have not told you — I cannot tell you — half she has done to move me to this step. But I am trespassing upon your time, and I will take my leave; I shall return in a few days."

They opened the door and went into the lodge, and as its lock clicked in shutting, the colonel added, with a grim smile, —

"You have things arranged very securely here."

"'Eternal vigilance is the price of' — security," replied his friend.

"But not of liberty, in this instance," rejoined the colonel, as he sprang into the saddle. "Farewell; perhaps you may have me for a patient one of these days."

"I should much prefer receiving you as a guest," said the doctor, "though, when you have remained with us a few days, and find how pleasantly we live, I don't know but you will envy me my 'lodge in a wilderness.'"

"*Nous verrons*," answered Colonel Bell, and with a friendly good by they parted.

The colonel retraced his steps to the persimmon tree, and then hesitated which route to pursue. In one direction the road led towards the woodland cottage, and he had nearly turned his horse's head that way, when he checked himself with a heavy sigh.

"Not there! not there!" he said; "I will not profane Corilla's grave with the warring and revengeful

passions of my soul;" and as he spoke, he rode slowly in the opposite direction, where, some ten or twelve miles distant, a small town was situated, in which he remained several days.

At the appointed time he returned to the doctor's lonely retreat.

As they met again, the colonel said, inquiringly, —

"You have sent some one, as I desired?"

"I have — a trusty servant. Did you not see him there as you passed? I sent him some hours ago."

"I saw some one, and supposed he might be from here. Now, then, we have only to wait the course of events."

"And meantime I must show you my house and grounds, my family, and my entomological cabinet. I have some rare specimens, I assure you."

"In both departments, I suppose," said the colonel, smiling. "So you amuse yourself by studying bugs as well as brains."

"And find both very interesting and exciting," replied the doctor, with professional ardor. "Colonel Bell, if you had been a poor man, and obliged to work for a living, as I did, you would have been far happier than you now are."

"*If, if* — What a world this world would be if there were no *ifs* in it!" said the colonel, bitterly.

While they had been talking, they walked up the broad avenue that led to the doctor's house, which stood a few rods from the hospital, but within sight and hearing of its

inmates. Colonel Bell was introduced to the doctor's wife, an educated, intelligent lady, as much interested in the study of mental disease as if she had received diplomas from half a dozen medical colleges. During the two days he staid with them, he learned the secret of his friend's contentment in his hermitage, and as had been prophesied, almost came to envy him a life which was far from being either solitary or monotonous.

On the afternoon of the third day of his visit, the servant, who had been sent to wait at the persimmon tree, made his appearance, bearing the three-cornered note. Colonel Bell and the doctor, who were amusing themselves with chess, looked at each other in silence; and it was hard to tell which of them was at that moment the palest.

"The time has come," said the latter, at length. "I will go and order the carriage. But why don't you read your note?"

"There is nothing in it to read. I used it simply as a token which could attract no particular attention, if by any accident it was lost, and yet be intelligible to me. But we must lose no time now. How soon can you be ready?"

"Immediately. Come with me."

They went out together; and soon after, a carriage, with four servants outside, drove rapidly down the avenue, to the large door by the lodge, which was opened for them to pass out.

"What is the distance we have to go?" asked Colonel Bell, as they entered the road.

"From here to the point where we intercept the road leading from your house to Mrs. Avenel's, is about eight miles."

"And yet I doubt if any of the families along there think you are so near. You have secreted yourself so entirely, that, although every body knows of the existence of your retreat, I don't remember ever hearing it spoken of."

"That only shows," said the doctor, "how readily our neighbors will forget us, if they have no opportunity to make use of us."

Two days had elapsed since Mrs. Bell bade adieu to her guests, and the uncertainty which hung over her prospects for the future added not a little to her present loneliness. After her last interview with her husband, she could hardly hope for a continuance of the friendliness that for a few weeks had existed between them; but still his conduct was not what she expected, in case he discovered how wilfully she had thwarted him; and knowing how irritable he was when disappointed and sorrowful, she tried to attribute his harshness to that cause. At first she would not leave the house, lest he should return in her absence; but growing weary of watching,

and having some curiosity to know how Mrs. Warner would appear, and what Hubert intended to do, in their unfortunate circumstances, she determined, on the morning of the third day, to take an early dinner and spend the afternoon in making some neighborly visits.

This was not a very common thing with her. Her haughty contempt for the dull domestic life which satisfied her neighbors had been so openly expressed, and her manner was so arrogant, that she was very generally disliked, and except when she entertained visitors from a distance, she was left mostly unsought in the wearisome solitude of her splendid home.

Now, as she came forth, richly dressed, to take her seat in the emblazoned carriage, which was particularly her own, she noticed, without further thought, that her husband's favorite boy, Jim, stood close beside the door, and looked in her face with an eager, inquisitive air.

"Drive to Mr. Warner's place, and then on to Mr. Blank's. As I return I will stop at the Pines," she said to the footman, who repeated the order to the coachman, and the carriage darted away; but before it had reached the end of the avenue leading to the road, Jim went by them on horseback, galloping at headlong speed.

It was nearly sunset before Clara Bell reached her mother's home. They had not seen each other since the day of Mrs. Avenel's return; and now she met her daughter in an embarrassed and agitated manner, that could not

fail to attract attention, and which, instead of arousing sympathy, seemed to chafe Clara's unamiable mood.

"Dear me, mother," she said, "how fussy and fidgety you are growing!" and then, half ashamed of her petulance, she added, with a careless laugh, "What in the world makes you look so dolorous just now?"

"My child, I thought you would feel sadly, too. I dreaded to see you after this *exposé*, which has made so much trouble for all of us," replied her mother, with gentle reproach.

"O, bah! don't begin to talk of that," said Clara, impatiently; "and pray be a wise woman, and don't distress yourself about that girl. I don't see why every body is making such a fuss about her. If she had been all she ever pretended to be, she would not be worth the shedding so many tears as I see you have been pouring forth; and Mrs. Warner could not speak of her this afternoon for weeping. By the way, why didn't she stay there? Why should she come here to bother you?"

"Dear Clara, don't talk so. I can't think you really have no sympathy with Helen's misfortunes. She is no trouble to me, and I am glad to have her here."

"It provokes me," continued Clara, "to think how easily all this scandal might have been saved. If Colonel Bell had only kept these children at home, in their proper places, as servants, they would have been happy, and nobody else would have suffered. But he must needs carry out his romantic notions, and this is the consequence."

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Avenel. "I should have said the painfulness of this case proceeded from quite another cause. Certainly you cannot blame your husband for his generosity and kindness."

"I do. They were entirely misplaced, and it only shows, that it is of no use to try to raise these people out of the position they were intended to fill. When they are there we get along well enough; but if they are any thing but servants, they make us a world of trouble."

"I do not think so," said her mother; "and even if it is as you say, can you think we are placed here, Clara, simply to seek our own selfish interests? What would this earth become, if no one was willing to make any sacrifice for his neighbor's good?"

"There are precious few persons who attain that pitch of perfection, at any rate," replied Clara, "and I've no desire to be one of the number. Making sacrifices isn't my *forte*, and I advise you to have as little as possible to do with the business. Leave it to the philanthropists, who can't make themselves famous in any other way, and so they try this method. It don't pay for private individuals. For instance, here are you, looking so pale and woe-begone about this Helen, that it almost gives me the blues to stay with you. Now, if you would only exercise a little philosophy, as I do, it wouldn't affect you thus. What is the use of fretting about the misfortunes of

another? I'm sure we all have enough of our own to make us old and wrinkled before our time."

Deeply pained at her cold and flippant manner of talking, Mrs. Avenel changed the subject of conversation by inquiring, abruptly, —

"Do you still intend embarking for Europe on the day fixed when I last saw you?"

"I can't tell; I haven't seen Colonel Bell since last week, and he is so capricious, he may have changed his plans."

"Haven't seen Colonel Bell! What do you mean?" said Mrs. Avenel, opening her eyes in amazement.

"No. He has been absent from home more than a week. Why are you so surprised?"

"Because I have received a daily note from him, inquiring for Helen's health."

It was now Clara's turn to look astonished; and after a moment's thought, she answered, —

"This is very singular; he certainly has not been at home during the interval. Did you notice who brought the billet?"

"I have never happened to see the messenger, as I sit with Helen most of the time. He must be in the neighborhood."

"Where can he be? I never knew him to make a neighborly visit before, and I can't see his object in doing so now; neither can I imagine which of our acquaintance he is visiting."

Clara spoke slowly and thoughtfully, and sat for a while in deep revery. This information made her very uneasy, and as she recalled her last interview with her husband, a vague foreboding of evil arose in her breast, and would not be shaken off, although she tried to disguise it from her mother.

She lingered longer than usual, and talked in an amiable and pleasant strain, to which her mother afterwards looked back with delight; and when she bade good by, moved by an unwonted impulse of tenderness, she threw her arms around Mrs. Avenel's neck, and kissed her.

This simple act, so rare with Clara, called forth quick tears of joy from the loving heart that her coldness had so often chilled, and warmly returning the caress, her mother said, —

"O my child, I wish we could live together; I am very lonely here sometimes."

"Well, if Colonel Bell concludes to go to Europe again without me, I will get divorced, and come here to live with you," replied Clara; and with another kind farewell, she entered the carriage.

It was some time after sunset, and quite dark in the woods, but in the level, open spaces, there was yet sufficient light to distinguish objects at some distance. Colonel Bell and the doctor had been walking to and fro, as they waited beside the intersection of the two roads, their

carriage hidden by the trees, a few rods away, while they gazed eagerly in the direction leading to Mrs. Avenel's house.

"What if she had returned before we reached here?" said the doctor, after a long pause.

"We will wait here a reasonable time, and make sure that is the case, and then we will drive on to my house. Some stratagem can be devised to meet that emergency. I wished to save her the mortification of having to call on the servants to aid her against me, or of having them know she went with us unwillingly. If she has not returned, this delay is favorable, since in the darkness she will not so easily discover where we are taking her."

"May she not have taken some other path homeward?"

"I think not. She likes to drive rapidly, and this is the best road. Look! I think I see the carriage now."

It came swiftly along, and as it approached, Colonel Bell placed himself in its course, so as to attract the coachman's attention, who checked his horses upon recognizing him. Meantime the doctor had stepped into the shelter of the bushes by the roadside, from whence he reappeared, at the right moment, with two stalwart men.

Colonel Bell, going close to the coachman, commanded him in a low voice to descend from his seat; and he instantly obeyed, full of wonder at meeting his master thus, which he was prevented from expressing by a peremptory order to call the footman, and tell him to come and help him a minute. He called as directed, for it was not the

first time he had received orders he did not comprehend, and the colonel, who was an indulgent master, was much beloved by his servants.

Hearing his voice, Mrs. Bell put her head out of the window to know what was the matter. When she saw her husband, she uttered an exclamation of surprise, and almost of alarm.

"Open the door for me," said Colonel Bell, in a subdued tone, to the footman, "and then both of you stand aside, and remain here until I return. Do you understand?"

"Yes, massa," they said at once, staring at him and at each other with the utmost perplexity.

"Come here instantly, Robert; tell me what is the matter," said Mrs. Bell, sharply and loudly.

The footman obeyed, and, as he opened the door, Colonel Bell entered, and without giving time to reply to her questions, said, coolly, as if he met her after a few hours' absence, "An accident has left my friend and myself on foot here in the woods. You will please allow us the privilege of a drive home in your carriage."

Those words the footman heard, and then, in one confused moment, he felt himself thrust aside; another gentleman entered the carriage after his master, and closed the door; a servant sprang into his place behind, and a strange coachman mounted the box, seized whip and reins, and, whirling the horses into the cross road, disappeared with the whole equipage, leaving him and his fellow-servant,

bewildered and half frightened, to conjecture what these strange proceedings might mean.

All had been done so rapidly that they did not think of following until it was too late; and seeing no speedier way of satisfying their curiosity, they concluded to wait their master's return, as he had ordered. Stretching themselves under the bushes, they were soon fast asleep.

Mrs. Bell was not less confounded than her servants at this sudden change. For a short time she could not speak, and the undefined fear of which she had been conscious from the minute she heard her husband was in the vicinity, increased to terror, as she saw by the deepening shadows that they had left the highway, and were proceeding in an opposite direction. She could not see the faces of her companions; but their silence was ominous, and convinced her that the excuse they had given for entering the carriage was a *ruse* to place her more completely in the power of the man she had so repeatedly exasperated.

She called wildly to the driver to stop, and perceiving she was utterly unheeded, she tried to open the door and spring out. But her hands were seized with a grasp of iron, which forced her back into her seat, and Colonel Bell said, in a voice terribly calm and stern, —

"Why are you so excited? What do you fear?"

"Order the carriage stopped, if you mean no harm to me. Why do not my servants obey me? What right

have you to give them orders?" she replied, trembling, yet courageous.

"You asked me once, 'Why should I seek to harm you?' I repeat the question to you," said the colonel, bitterly. "Madam, beware! Your guilty fears betray you."

"Where am I going?" she exclaimed; and again she screamed to the servants to stop; but her cries came back with a mocking echo, and the swift motion continued.

"It is useless to call; your servants are far behind. We have another coachman now," said her husband, and we shall not stop until we arrive at the house of my friend."

"Who is he? Why have you not introduced him to me?"

"You will know soon enough. Do not fear. No harm is intended, and you are going where you will be safe, and can be happy, if you will."

He still held her hands, and finding she could not release herself, she scorned to struggle, or make any plea for pity. Hers was no weak spirit, to be broken with the first blow, and she had not braved him so often to consider all as lost because of this apparent triumph. She knew he dared not take away her life, even if he wished, and she trusted that her servants would raise the alarm, and her mother would seek her out, in whatever place of concealment her husband had provided. A thousand thoughts and schemes flashed like lightning through

her brain, as she sat silently beside him, and the doctor could not help admiring the dignity and self-possession with which she controlled all further expression of her apprehension.

The lodge was reached at length; the gate opened; they drove up the avenue, and paused before a large building. Colonel Bell sprang out first, and held the door open for his wife to descend. An immense lantern hung over the entrance to the building, and a servant stood near with a candle, by the light of which she could scrutinize the faces near her. Her own became more colorless than before, as she met her husband's gaze, and drawing back a little she motioned to the doctor to pass out.

"I await your movements, madam," he replied, with great politeness.

"I shall not leave the carriage," she said, quietly, but firmly.

"I beg you will. It will be very unpleasant for us all if we are obliged to use force," he answered, gently.

"You will not dare use force — I am a lady," she said.

"There are several ladies here, and they were quite unwilling to enter," the doctor answered, in the same soft, pleasant voice.

"Were they compelled to come?" she asked, quickly.

"They are here," was the reply.

Clara looked around her. The night was dark, and the light of the lantern illumined only a small portion of the building. Though she had never seen it, — for visitors

were not admitted here, — she began to have some idea of its locality, and the purpose for which it was used, for she had often heard of its existence. It required all her strength of mind to keep from bursting into tears and crying out for help; but she could not endure to give her husband the satisfaction of seeing her thus humbled. Turning to the doctor she said, proudly, —

"You will tell me, at least, where I am."

"With pleasure, madam," he answered, kindly. "This is the Glen Retreat, where I hope you will find much to interest you."

"And you are Dr. Monteith?"

"I am: shall I have the pleasure of assisting you from the carriage?"

"I have told you I shall not leave it, doctor. I am sure you are a gentleman, and I appeal to you for protection against the cruelty of that man," — pointing to Colonel Bell. "If he has said any thing to make you think I am a fit subject for this institution, he has *lied*; and I entreat you, by your honor, not to detain me here against my will."

"Certainly not, madam. How could you suspect me of such a desire. Only have the goodness to come in and take tea with us, after this long drive."

His smiling, unmoved face was more hopeless to look upon than even that of her husband — lowering and stern with its burning, angry eyes. She sank back in a dark corner of the coach, and for a while no one spoke.

"Come, Clara," said her husband, presently, "we have waited long enough."

"I will not come," she cried, vehemently; "I will never enter those walls."

"As you please," he said, gloomily; "I would have saved you this indignity."

He stepped aside, and three strong men appeared, one of whom had a straight jacket in his hand. Clara glanced at them, and exclaimed, as she grasped the doctor's arm, with a shudder, "Don't let them touch me — doctor, you cannot — it is too shameful."

"Certainly not; there is no need of it. You will allow me the pleasure of leading you into the house," he replied, in those bland tones which seemed to indicate entire unconsciousness of any attempt at coercion. As he spoke he waved his hand, and the men vanished, while her husband resumed his place by the carriage door.

She now saw that resistance was indeed vain; and since, for the present, she must submit, she resolved to do it in such a way as would convince the doctor that he had been imposed upon, if he had been made to believe she was insane. Addressing him with a calmness and dignity that touched him, notwithstanding his prepossessions against her, she said, —

"From the high praises I have heard of yourself and your institution, I cannot suppose you would aid a scheme so nefarious as this, and I know you must have been

deceived by Colonel Bell. He hates me, and has even threatened my life. Is it not so? Did you not expect to see a mad woman, and don't you see how calm I am?"

"My dear lady, don't oblige me to take part in a family quarrel," said the doctor, deprecatingly; "and pray excuse me if I remind you again that supper is waiting. I am sure you must be hungry."

Her features quivered with a spasm of despairing dread as she turned from him; but collecting all her strength, she composed them again, and slowly stepping to the ground, with the haughty grace of an empress, she allowed the doctor to lead her up the steps. As she passed her husband she said, half aloud, —

"I will see you once more, sir, where *justice* shall be done me."

"It is for that you are here," he answered; "*to receive justice.* My face you will never see again."

She started and trembled violently, for something in those cold, sinister tones made her feel as if she was entering a door which, like the gate of Dante's Inferno, excluded hope.

But without another word she went on, and disappeared within the hall.

His gaze followed her until the door was closed, and then he threw himself into the carriage, saying to the coachman, —

"Drive back as fast as you can."

"But de horses, massa — 'pears like dey won't stand it no way. Dey come like streak ob lightnin'."

"Let them go home the same way, then," was the reply. As they passed out the gate they met the doctor's carriage, which had just returned. When they reached the place where he left his own servants, he signed for the carriage to pause, and called their names, loudly, hardly expecting any reply; but the sound aroused them from their sleep, and greatly to his satisfaction they came crawling out from their leafy lair. He then dismissed the doctor's coachman, liberally rewarding him for his services, and reinstating his own driver, bade him proceed homeward.

When he arrived at his own house, the servants were astonished to see that he was alone, and Robert and his companion exchanged significant glances, which told of surmises too frightful to mention. The colonel noticed them, and assuming a carelessness and ease of manner he was far from feeling, he said, —

"Did you think I was a great while gone this evening, boys? I hardly expected to find you there, on my return; but as you did so well I must give you something to pay you for it, and when your mistress comes home she will give you more, perhaps. I left her at a large party, and hardly think she will return to-night. If she don't, I shall call for her to-morrow. So go, and be sure the horses are well taken care of, for they have had a hard drive."

The negroes took the money, with tokens of satisfaction; but as their master went into the house, they pointed at him slyly, and with a wise shake of the head, Robert said, —

"Keep de eye open, Sambo, for all dat. Somep'n powerful queer 'bout dis yer."

CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH.

"And in the tumult and excess
Of act and passion under sun,
We sometimes hear — O, soft and far,
As silver star did touch with star —
The kiss of Peace and Righteousness,
Through all things that are done."

"Ding, ding, ting-a-ling-ting."

It was the last sound of the bell which announced the close of recess, in the academy of the large town in the interior of New York, where Edgar Avenel had made himself a home. As the tintinnabulation ceased, the urchins, great and small, came trooping from every part of the play ground, and pouring in at the open door; some with suddenly thoughtful brow, as if taking back the care of studies a while forgotten, and some with half-suppressed shouts, or with a leap, a tossing of caps, or a hurried prank, that seemed to serve as a vent for the steam which must escape, before the valves of the intellectual machine could safely be shut down for the afternoon's work.

Two or three of the older boys had been standing near the door; and as they turned leisurely to enter the building, some of the younger ones brushed past them, and crowded into the hall in breathless glee. Among these

was a handsome, well-dressed, bright-looking mulatto boy, who, happening to be the last of the group, and running with his arm locked around one of his comrades, was pushed a little roughly against one of his elders, who stood in the doorway. The boy turned with a glance of apology; but his smile was answered by a frowning brow, and his half-uttered words interrupted by a sudden movement, that snatched the cap from his head, and sent it whizzing far away into the street.

"Take that, you nigger, and don't be crowding before your betters, next time."

The mulatto boy looked at him an instant, and involuntarily his fist clinched, and half raised itself to avenge the insult; but there was no time to be lost then, and he darted out to regain his property.

"That was too bad," said one of the boys who stood by; "now he'll be late, and have to take *one*."

"I don't care how many marks he takes," replied the first boy, sullenly; "he's an impudent nigger."

"You don't like it because he's above you, I guess," whispered another, laughing, as they moved on to the school room.

The boys had all been seated, and the first class was called, when the mulatto entered, and moved with quick step to his place. His brow was flushed and his face clouded; and when he sat down he shaded his eyes with his clasped hands, and bent over his book, to hide the tears that *would* fill his eyes, though he suffered them not to

fall. Again and again he tried to fix his mind his lesson and to calm himself enough to understand ; but the painful thoughts still asserted their power in spite of all his efforts to forget, and he was thankful that his recitations for the day were over, for he knew that to speak one word would overcome him entirely. When school was dismissed, he lingered until some moments after all had left the hall, and then, gathering his books together, he slowly followed them. He did not look up as he passed the desk where his teacher was still busy, and when he took down his cap he drew it over his brows, without heeding the mud that covered it, and crossing the play-ground rapidly, had nearly reached the gate before he was noticed by his schoolfellows.

"My eyes! what a looking cap!" cried one.

"Hillo! Hen, your cap's muddy," said another, good-naturedly.

"What a load of books you always carry home! you don't catch me digging that way, I guess," said a third, mischievously snatching at the strap which bound the books, and jerking them from his hand as he passed.

"Let him alone," said another boy, who sat on the fence, whitling; "let him alone; he's in the right of it to study. It takes considerable *larnin'* to make a professor of boot-blacking."

The words were spoken with a boy's thoughtless love of teasing; but they seemed like a premeditated taunt to the lacerated spirit already smarting with a sense of

wrong, and stooping to pick up his books, he swung them round his head, to give greater impetus to the blow, and then, with flashing eyes and an inarticulate cry of vengeance, he sent them full at the head of his tormentor. The boy fell senseless from the fence; but he who gave the blow had hurried away without pausing to see its effects, and ran towards home at full speed, his heart heaving, and a hot, stifling sensation in his throat that nearly stopped his breath. He reached, at length, a large, handsome house, situated in a retired street, and surrounded by gardens. This was Mr. Avenel's residence, and this boy was an orphan who had been for some years under his care.

Among the servants left him by his mother was one whom she particularly recommended to his care, on account of her faithful services beside the bed of sickness and death. This woman refused to leave him when he offered to locate her in a home of her own, and came with his family to New York accompanied by her young grandson, the only relic left of her once numerous family. But her aged frame was unable to withstand the inclemency of an unusually severe winter, which followed their removal. A sudden cold induced congestion of the lungs, and she died, confiding the boy, for whom alone she wished to live, to the care of those who had been so kind to her. The sensitive orphan, who had been thus given to their care, became very dear to them, as well as to all their family; and when, with

advancing years, his health grew firm, and his nature, ever docile and affectionate, began to develop noble traits of character, and intellect of no common order, it became a serious question how he should be treated, and what degree of education he should receive. The plan they adopted was one that involved much anxiety and labor. Neighbors pronounced it Utopian and Quixotic, and even Mr. Avenel was so far biased by early prejudices that he gave at first but a reluctant consent to his wife's entreaty, and prophesied to her no little trouble in the result.

But she, true to her usual unselfishness, and gentle as she was firm, won him at last to a hearty coöperation with her. "We must do what we can individually to raise this down-trodden race," she had said; "else how can they ever attain that position of equality to which we are willing to accord them the right, when they have the capacity to fill it? If Henry were a white child, thrown thus upon our care, we should not think of making him a servant, or even of giving him a trade, while he shows such decided marks of intellect, that the highest attainments seem possible to him. Why, then, should his color make any difference in our treatment of him?" And thus it was decided that the boy should be sent to school, and occupy in the family the same position as if his skin were white as theirs. Thus situated, and treated with a protecting kindness that won his almost adoring gratitude

and love, he was, during his earlier years, exposed to very little annoyance; but his protectors were too wise to continue this care too far. One so situated must. in the present state of society, early learn to "endure hardness," or he will be good for nothing; and soon after his tenth birthday, he was sent to the public school, and left to the discipline of character acquired by unreserved contact with all sorts of boys.

Every body who understands the prevailing disposition of "Young America" may imagine the nature of Henry's trials after this change in his life; but he had been so educated, and was himself of such a noble and ingenuous nature, that he was slow to learn the exact meaning of the rudeness to which he was sometimes subjected; and as he had the power of making many friends among his comrades, and was a great favorite with his teacher, it took him some time to discover that by all, friend as well as foe, he was considered as belonging to an inferior grade of society, from which no personal merit could wholly raise him. Then, indeed, the "iron entered his soul;" and though he had each week become increasingly unwilling to speak of his wrongs, Mrs. Avenel had seen, with sad forebodings, that he brooded over them in secret, and that for several months he had been growing suspicious and excitable, and imbittered against those who would be his friends. At the end of two years he had been promoted to the academy, with high honors and many praises; but since then he had been

often more gloomy than before, and it was painful to see how that cheerful and generous nature was wearing away beneath the irritability caused by the consciousness of his position. He had often come from school, and sat down to his lessons with a weary, listless manner, which betrayed a secret heaviness of heart, that hardly yielded even to the caresses and the winning gayety of the young children, whom he regarded with an enthusiastic fondness passing a brother's love.

On the piazza two of these children were now playing, who clapped their hands in joyous greeting, and ran towards him as he came near; but he avoided them, and, entering the house, passed through the rooms till he came to a small library, where a lady sat by the window, reading.

When he saw her, he hesitated a moment, half turning back; but she looked up, and the expression of her face seemed to dissipate his slight accession of reserve; for he sprang forward, and casting himself on the carpet beside her, covered his burning face with his hands, and rested them on her knees, trembling all over with emotion.

Startled and surprised, she bent over him, laying her cool hand on his throbbing temples, and exclaiming, "Henry! my dear boy! what is it? What has happened?" The gentle, pitying tones of her voice broke down the last barrier of self-restraint, and all the long-suppressed anguish and passion of his soul burst forth in tears and sobs that were almost convulsive; while to her

repeated inquiries he answered, at length, only with wild cries and incoherent murmurs.

Mrs. Avenel's eyes filled with tears of painful sympathy; but she was not wholly unprepared for this explosion of feeling. Through many months she had been noticing the gathering of this storm over the mental horizon which her watchful love had for so long a time kept free from clouds. And now, she bent over him, listening to that exceeding passionate and bitter cry, "I can't bear it — I can't! I wish I was dead! I wish I had never been born! I would lie down this minute, and have every bit of skin taken off, if it would only make me white."

How could she comfort him? Her own heart was swelling with pity and indignation, but her power to calm and soothe him seemed failing her. He moved restlessly beneath the gentle pressure of her hand, and at length threw himself down on the carpet, exclaiming, "Why don't you let me go away and be a shoe-black or a chimney-sweep? That's all I'm fit for! Why didn't you bring me up to be a servant? Why didn't you leave me in the country where I was born? I should have known my place then, and been happy."

"Henry," said Mrs. Avenel, in a low, sad tone, "could you have been happy as a slave?"

The boy's loud cries ceased suddenly, and he shuddered all over. He could seldom bear to hear this subject alluded to, and Mrs. Avenel was frightened for the result of the words that had escaped her almost unconsciously.

She sat down on the carpet beside him, and lifting his head in her lap, tenderly wiped his tear-wet face. "O my poor boy," she said, "I pity you; yours is a hard lot; I have long dreaded the time when you should realize all its sorrow; but, Henry, remember, it is not the *worst* thing that might have been."

Again he shuddered, and, throwing his arms around her, buried his face in her dress; but the sudden shock of her first words had calmed him, and after a few moments, he said, "No, no, I didn't mean *that;* I was ungrateful; any thing is better than *that*. But the boys are always telling me I'm out of my place, and sometimes I think I am."

"Your place is the highest which you have the capacity to fill. Why shouldn't you aspire as high as any body? Don't you think you are capable of any greater work than blacking shoes?" she added, patting his cheek playfully.

"Yes," he answered, half smiling; "sometimes I have such grand thoughts, such beautiful thoughts; I can't tell exactly what they are, but my mind seems full of them; and I used to be so proud to think what I would be when I became a man; but now," he added, despondingly, "I can't think of any thing but the ugly speeches the boys are always making, and the way they treat me. Even when they seem to be kind, they think they're *condescending*, to use me well."

"The boys are very unkind, and I have no doubt you

have a great deal to bear," said Mrs. Avenel. "When you were younger, I used to tell you to forget it; but now you are thirteen years old, and it is useless for you to shut your eyes to the trials which you will be continually meeting, in one form or another, through all your life. We must look the trouble full in the face, and seek at the right sources for help to endure it. In the first place, we won't think we're in any worse case than we really are. *All* the boys don't abuse you?"

"O, no," replied Henry; "there's only two or three that *abuse* me, — that seem to dislike me, I mean, — and those I don't care for, for I know it is envy because I'm ahead of them in the classes. But they all have a manner as if they thought I was beneath them. There ain't many of them that play with me *exactly* as they do with the others. Some avoid me altogether, as if they thought I wasn't good enough to speak to, and they make remarks I know they mean I shall overhear; and some of those whom I really think like me, are always teasing me, and calling me names."

"So you have an uncomfortable time of it," said Mrs. Avenel, deeply touched by his sad tone, but trying to speak cheerfully; "are you sure it is not a little your own fault? Aren't you too sensitive? and don't you sometimes take offence when none is intended? What do they call you?"

"They call me a nigger," he replied, hesitatingly, and with a fresh burst of silent tears.

"Well, and so you are," she answered, calmly.

"O Mrs. Avenel!" and he raised himself to look in her face reproachfully, and with great surprise.

"It is true," she replied; "and the only question is, whether that is to be considered a term of reproach. Every thing else being equal, is not a negro as worthy of respect as a white man?"

"I suppose so," said he, "but they ain't considered so."

"We're not talking now of things as they seem, but of things as they are. It is a great thing to be sure we have a right to *respect ourselves;* and let me tell you, my dear Henry, it is because this quality of self-respect is generally but feebly developed in your race, that they have been so little respected by others, and so easily kept in a menial position. Other circumstances have combined to aid, but this has been one great thing. Now, the name is nothing; it is only the way you take it, that gives it power to wound. I knew a boy who was very much enraged because another called him a 'lexicon.'"

Henry laughed, and sat up, interested, in spite of himself. "I shouldn't mind being called a lexicon, but ——"

"But you mind being called a *nigger*, child. You must conquer this. It is nothing to be ashamed of, that you belong to a different race from your schoolfellows. When they see that it no longer teases you, they will no more think of using it as a term of reproach, than they would now think of calling you an Indian, to vex you.

Accept it as a fact, and they will cease to apply it as an insult."

"I suppose it is so," said he, thoughtfully, after a long pause; "and you are all so kind to me that I don't suppose I ought to be unhappy. It isn't many white boys that have such a pleasant home as I have here, and plenty of books, and every thing," he added, looking up in her face with a grateful smile.

"Dear child," said Mrs. Avenel, "you have it in your power to make us very proud and happy. I know it will inspire you with fresh courage, and a new motive for exertion, and so I will tell you that some of our neighbors, whose conduct has wounded you, regard our treatment of you in the light of an experiment, and are waiting to see, by your success or failure, whether it is really proper to treat a negro boy on terms of entire equality. If you become a learned and good man, I shall be more grateful than I can express."

"I will try," said Henry; but the thought brought back the sting of his recent sorrow, and the next moment he threw himself down, exclaiming, in tones of despair, "O, dear, dear, what is the use, after all? What is the use of trying to study and get knowledge? What is the use of being wiser or better than others? I shall always be looked down upon. I shall never be able to use what I know. I shall never be treated as if I was white."

"Henry," said Mrs. Avenel, passing her arm around him, and speaking in a low, impressive tone, "there was

One, who had all riches, and power, and knowledge, at his command; one who for eighteen centuries has exerted a wider influence, and received more devoted love and veneration, than any being who ever lived on earth; and of him it was said, 'He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'"

"That was our Lord, the Savior" whispered Henry.

"It was; and all that was noble, all that was attractive, all that was inspiring, was centred in him, and exemplified in his life. What if your best endeavors cannot win you that esteem and popularity which you desire; is it no motive for exertion, that you can imitate him? The circumstance of your birth will indeed, for no fault of yours, subject you to much that is painful, and cut you off from those ambitious aims that seem highest in the eyes of the world; but it enables you to work most effectually in the cause which now enlists the sympathies of the philanthropic all over the earth. You can do more than ten white men to solve the problem that has perplexed and distressed the nation. Perhaps I am using language beyond your years; do you understand me?"

He shook his head dubiously.

"I am trying to give you a hope and an object in life. I have seen how discouraged you felt lately, and I did not wonder, for it is hard for such young shoulders to bear the cross; but, Henry, your mission is to your own people, and there you can do a great and noble work, even by simply educating yourself; for every negro of intellectual

ability and attainments furnishes an unanswerable argument to the friends of your race. They are oppressed and despised, but their help must come from themselves; they must demonstrate their fitness for equality."

"But it is very hard," sighed the child.

"Yes, dear, it is very hard; but you know, the greater the effort the greater the glory: and He of whom we spoke 'was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' His friends deserted him in the hour of his utmost need, and his enemies persecuted him even to death; but he bore it all that he might be the Savior of man."

But the boy persisted, despondingly, "He *could* bear it — he was God."

"And therefore he is still our ever-present Helper. Therefore all power is his, in heaven and on earth, and he can comfort you with the fulness of an entire sympathy, and aid you with divine strength. You can be brave, and strong, and self-reliant, with such help."

"I will try," said the boy, catching something of her enthusiasm. "After all, it is grand to overcome difficulties, and it is kind of mean to want to get along always the easiest way."

Just then they were interrupted by a clear young voice, that called his mother's name; and the oldest son, Charley Avenel, came bounding into the room.

"O mother!" he began; and then, seeing Henry, he turned to him, eagerly — "O Henry, is it true that you

knocked Ned Conant down, 'cause he called you names. Tell me, do; I shall be so glad if you did."

"Hush, Charley," said his mother's gentle voice, and she looked at Henry inquiringly.

"I threw my books at him," said he, in a penitent tone, "but I didn't know it knocked him down. I felt as if I should die. I thought I would never look into my books again, or try to be any body."

"Good!" shouted Charley, throwing up his cap, heedless of his mother's reproving glance,—"good again! I'm glad it knocked him over. He's always plaguing you. If I was big enough, I'd lick him myself. No matter; his cousin, little Sam Conant, is coming to our school by and by, and won't I take it out in plaguing him!"

"You foolish boy! Henry don't need you to fight his battles," said Mrs. Avenel, who could not help smiling at the young champion. "How was it, Henry? Tell me about it," she added, turning to him.

"Yes, tell us about it," said another voice and Mr. Avenel appeared in the doorway, with one little girl clinging to his coat, and another "wee toddling thing" perched on his shoulder, steadying herself there by clasping her chubby arms around his forehead. His gay looks fell as he saw, by his wife's attitude and Henry's swollen eyes, that something serious had occurred; and he checked the children's mirth to listen to Henry's simple and honest statement of the events of the afternoon. "I hope

he is not hurt," said he, in a subdued tone, as he closed his recital. "But I felt then as if I could murder him. Who told you it knocked him down, Charley?"

"The boys said so," replied Charley, "and I do declare I'm glad of it; I *am*, and father looks as if he was glad too, though you do shake your head, mother."

"I don't know, but I do think it served him right; and Henry shan't go to school to be insulted," replied Mr. Avenel, whose indignation, for the moment, got the better of his judgment.

"O, I think there will be no trouble," said Mrs. Avenel, cheerfully; "I think Henry can take care of himself."

"Yes, Henry, take care of yourself, — that's the talk — go at 'em and knock 'em down when they plague you," cried Charley, eagerly.

Mr. Avenel laughed. "I don't think that is exactly what your mother meant," said he. "You know she don't go in for knock-down arguments — she isn't a fighting character."

"Yes," said Charley, "I know she's a great peace woman; but it won't do all the time, I tell *you*."

"A soft answer will go a good ways, though, in turning away wrath," said Mrs. Avenel, smiling.

"Now, mother, I tell you, you don't know about that," said Charley, eagerly. "Soft answers may do for some boys; but the only way to do with such boys as Ned

Conant is to pitch right into 'em, and make 'em real afraid of you, and then they'll behave themselves."

Mrs. Avenel smiled, but pursued the subject no further at that time; and the children seized the moment of silence to resume the frolic in which the twilight hour was always passed when their father was at home.

Escaping with some difficulty from the noisy group, Henry seated himself in the bay window, and remained quiet and thoughtful; but when lights were brought and the family gathered around the table, it was easy to see, by his calm and happy face, that the dark cloud had rolled away from his soul. It may be he did not then fully understand all that Mrs. Avenel had said; but her words had given a new turn to his thoughts, and a definite object of aspiration, of which no adverse circumstances could deprive him; and they remained in his memory, until, with advancing years and knowledge, he could appreciate the noble lesson they conveyed.

CHAPTER NINETEENTH.

> "A merry-hearted childhood, running wild
> With pranks, and quirks, and jests, and oddities,
> And bearing still a promise rare and rich
> Of noble manhood in the after years."

Ned Conant was one of those boys who seem possessed by an irrepressible love of teasing, to the effects of which both friend and foe were exposed indiscriminately; and therefore there was some variety of opinion among his schoolfellows, as they witnessed Henry's sudden assault and its unexpected result. The blow had struck his forehead, and for a few moments completely stunned him; but he was not really injured, and in a little while he recovered his senses, and sat up. At first he hardly knew what to make of his sudden change of position; but the anxious faces around him, and the various exclamations which he heard, soon recalled the facts.

"The little fellow aims well," said he, with a rueful face, as he sat holding his aching head.

"Straight as an arrow," said one of the boys; "and served you right, too, for you're always tormenting him."

"I'd pay him for it to-morrow, if I were you," said another.

"I must go home, then, and get this crack in my skull sewed up, or I shan't be able to," replied Ned, rising slowly to his feet; and the group scattered in various directions to their homes, after indulging in a few more comments on what had happened.

When Ned entered the family sitting room, his mother was alarmed at his extreme paleness, and anxiously inquired the cause.

"My head aches shockingly," he said, as he threw himself on the sofa; "I got a fall that hurt it."

His mother went for some cold applications, and his sister threw down her work to arrange the pillows for him; for Ned, being an only son, was a person of some consequence in the family. "Here is quite a swelling on your forehead," said his mother, as she was bathing it, a few moments after.

"The fact is," replied Ned, "that little Henry Lane threw his books at me."

"And knocked you down?" exclaimed his mother.

"Prone to the ground at once, as butcher felleth ox," replied he, quoting from the First Class Book.

"The little scamp!" said Mrs. Conant; "that's what Mrs. Avenel's model child has come to — is it?"

"Well, I don't know as he was to blame," replied Ned, "for I was teasing him. I didn't mean any harm, but I've given him a good many rubs, and he don't like me very well."

Little Nelly, who was sitting by the fire warming her

doll's feet, looked up, as she heard these words, exclaiming, "I shouldn't think he would! Any body must be terribly forgiving to like you."

A general laugh greeted this *naïve* expression, and the child added, by way of explanation, "He does *tease* any body so!"

"Nelly hasn't forgotten the emetic I gave her doll, and made it throw up all its sawdust," said Ned. "Hold on, mother; don't drown a fellow with that water."

"Hold back your head a little, and then it won't run into your eyes. What did you say to make Henry so angry?" asked his sister Julie.

"I hinted to him about being a professor of boot-blacking — and he is very proud of his scholarship."

"And a very good scholar he is, too. O Ned, you shouldn't do so," replied Julie.

"I can't help it — he is so thin skinned," said Ned. He's a thousand times more ashamed of himself than any body else is of him."

"And because he is sensitive and timid you delight in oppressing and making him miserable. That is certainly a noble disposition, Master Ned, and I should think you would be proud of it," said Julie, indignantly.

"Why don't he stand up for himself, then? He's as good as any body if he only thought so," he answered, bluntly.

"You know very well he *can't*, while you all unite to taunt him and try to keep him down. You boys are real

tyrants," said Julie. 'Hit him again — he hasn't any friends!' — that's what they say. I've heard them a hundred times."

"Come, little Julie, don't cry; I ain't half so wicked as you think I am," interrupted Ned.

"I have no idea of crying, but it makes me angry to have you do so; it is a shame!" said Julie, flushed and excited, but unable to make herself look much more fierce than a white dove does when its feathers are ruffled.

"Angry! you angry!" shouted Ned. "Come, now, that's a good one! I should like to see you real mad, just for once, Julie; we'd mark down the day with blue chalk — wouldn't we, mother?"

Mrs. Conant smiled, and Ned, seeing in her face an expression rather different from that with which his sister regarded him, added, —

"My head is better; I guess I've had enough of cold water. Stop bathing now, mother, and tell us if you think I'm such an awful sinner, just for a little bit of fun."

"Well, as Julie says, it don't seem kind of you to tease him if he feels badly about it; but then —" and Mrs. Conant hesitated, for she had not quite forgiven the blow, respecting the effects of which she still felt anxious.

"That's right, mother; you be on my side. Say you think he ought to stick up for himself," said Ned, coaxingly.

"I don't think he ought to *fight*; he ought not to have knocked you down."

"O, that was an accident — the knocking down. The books happened to hit my forehead, and down I went. It was fair play; I don't blame him."

"That is one good thing in you, Ned; you don't bear malice; you are not revengeful," said Julie, in a mollified tone.

"Revenge! I scorn it!" Ned said, throwing out his arms with a gesture that threw off the cloths his mother had laid over his head. "Don't cover me up with those wet rags, or I shall think I am dead and buried, as well as knocked down."

"She desisted at his request, and as she removed her hydropathic array, she said soberly to Julie, —

"I shall go over to talk with Mrs. Avenel about this. She thought she was going to have a piece of perfection in that child; but he seems to have a horrid temper, and she ought to know it, and not persist in sending him among children that don't want him for a playmate."

"O, nonsense, mother," Ned broke in earnestly; "don't you do any such thing. He would be a fool if he didn't get mad, once in a while, with the way the boys rowel him sometimes; and all I blame him for is, that he don't get mad oftener. He is a real fine little fellow, and I'm going to turn right about and stand up for him. This last knock-down argument has convinced me, and little Julie shan't have to cry over my wickedness any more.

So, Miss Julie, you see what a magnanimous fellow I am — ain't I now? — to own up at this rate."

"You are; you have quite redeemed yourself in my opinion," she answered, smiling. Then turning to her mother, she added, coaxingly, "Please don't say any thing about it to Mrs. Avenel. That poor little fellow must have a great deal to bear, and I do pity him. Those large eyes of his have a sad, timid look, that goes to my heart. And then Mrs. Avenel is such a nice lady! I'm afraid you'll hurt her feelings."

"O, he'll tell her himself; he tells her every thing," said Ned, carelessly, "and my head is like old china — least said, soonest mended."

"Well, well — just as you please, children," replied Mrs. Conant, as she left the room; and the subject was not again renewed until after tea. As Ned lay on the sofa, while his mother and sister sat near busy with their sewing, there was a ring at the door bell, and Mrs. Avenel entered.

The color burned brightly on the boy's cheeks, which had until then been very pale from the effect of his accident, and as he met the gaze of her mild, dark eyes, he started from his couch with an uneasy feeling of guilt, which did not escape her quick observation; but without appearing to notice it, she hastened to dispel all embarrassment by the gentle and quiet grace with which, after the usual salutations had passed, she added, —

"I could not be contented to wait until morning without

coming to know if Master Ned was much hurt by his fall. Henry will say what he pleases in apology for his share of the injury; but I must express my own sorrow that it should have occurred. Ned has taken an invalid's position, I see, but I hope he does not suffer much, Mrs. Conant."

"O, it is nothing; I shall be all right to-morrow: my head is so soft that it don't crack easy," said Ned, hastily; and his mother added her assurance, to dispel Mrs. Avenel's fears. But, still retaining a little of the feeling to which her own alarm had given rise, she could not resist the temptation to lecture her friend a little upon a course of conduct that seemed to her so injudicious, and perhaps to indulge

"That last infirmity of noble minds" —

the desire to say, "I told you so."

Thus actuated, she added, after a momentary pause, "I must say, my dear Mrs. Avenel, this is only what I have always expected and prophesied. If you have trouble with that child, it won't be for want of advice about the way you have educated him. I told you it would just make him unfit to stay where he belonged, and you would never be able to get him into a higher class. I wonder you don't see it now, and take the child away from a place, where, if he is sensitive, as Ned says he is, he must be continually having his feelings wounded; for I don't suppose Ned is the only one who plagues him."

Mrs. Avenel's face flushed, but she answered gently, —

"We encourage him to persevere, and keep him at the school, on the same principle that you acted the other day, when you made Nellie have her tooth extracted — the old principle of enduring a little present pain for the sake of great future good. It applies to a child's toothache, but it has made heroes and martyrs as well."

"But you make yourself so much trouble," rejoined Mrs. Conant; "if you had never attempted to do so much for him, he would have been entirely satisfied with being well situated as a servant, and that is all I believe the negroes are fit for."

"Your opinions would suit some of our southern friends," said Mrs. Avenel, dryly.

"O, I want them to be *free*; there is no need of keeping them in slavery if they are servants," rejoined Mrs. Conant quickly.

"With regard to Henry, we have only done what we considered our duty," replied Mrs. Avenel, recovering from her momentary irritation. "Excuse me, but a condemnation of slavery comes with a poor grace from the lips of a person who has no sympathy with efforts to raise the colored race."

"You are severe, Mrs. Avenel," said Mr. Conant, who had entered while she was speaking, and now stood warming himself at the fire.

"I did not mean to be severe," said she, more gently; "but if you could see how impossible it is for those who

live among slaves — ignorant, degraded, and indolent, if not vicious — to realize that any of that race can be intended by the Creator to occupy a higher position than that they have always held, in this country at least, you would not wonder that I speak earnestly."

"There is a great difference, however, between keeping them as slaves and employing them as hired servants," said Mrs. Conant.

"Certainly there is. But persons who have been born and raised in slaveholding states have an obliquity of vision on this and every other point connected with slavery, which is inconceivable to those who have not witnessed it — a mental strabismus, in comparison with which any bodily cross eyes, however extreme, fail to astonish, and which nothing will ever cure except ocular demonstration that the negroes can not only take care of themselves physically, but can become educated, refined, and intellectual. Let people at the north, who want slavery abolished, set about trying to accomplish this object, and they will work with some prospect of success."

"I did not know you abolitionists held such views," said Mr. Conant, in some surprise at her earnestness.

"I don't know that all do," she replied, smiling; "but I certainly consider the prejudice against color which prevails at the north a more serious obstacle to the accomplishment of our wishes than any thing at the south."

"You don't consider the prejudice greater here than there!" exclaimed Mrs. Conant.

"No, not greater — perhaps not so great; but intrenched behind more impregnable barriers, and harder to be conquered."

"What has occasioned this conversation?" asked Mr. Conant, abruptly, not much liking the turn it had taken.

"I occasioned it," said Ned. "All the blame and all the books fall on my offending head, and I haven't much doubt but I deserve them both."

"For my part," said Mr. Conant, "I approve of each person looking after his own affairs. The southerners are competent to manage theirs, and I believe in letting them alone. If every body took care of number one, all the world would be taken care of. Let a man look out for himself and his family, and leave others to do the same."

"Like the man that prayed, 'God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, and my half of Pete, the nigger,'" suggested Ned, slyly.

His father frowned, but could not help laughing, the next moment, at the boy's comical commentary on his words.

"I don't pretend to know what ought to be done in every case," said Mrs. Avenel, after a pause; "but I assure you that, however politicians may talk at Washington, to frighten the doughfaces, there is a class among the slaveholders, who realize the evils of their position, and would not agree with your opinion that they are

competent to manage, without aid from their neighbors, this complicated business in which they are involved. Such persons are looking anxiously to see how far theory accords with practice, and if the free blacks are becoming more enlightened and self-sustaining, after years of freedom, or whether the proclivity downwards continues as strong as ever. They watch silently, however, for no body dares say openly what would offend the multitude."

"I approve of educating the negroes; certainly I do. But something is due to the prejudices of society also; and I never noticed that a man got along any easier for disregarding what society demands," said Mr. Conant; adding, with a smile, "Mrs. Avenel, excellent as she is, is a little too much inclined that way, — a little too much of an enthusiast, — and so are all her family."

"Do you think so?" replied Mrs. Avenel, returning the smile; and after a little more conversation on topics of general interest, she took leave of her neighbors, and returned home.

Mr. and Mrs. Conant were very nice persons, very respectable persons, very excellent persons; fond of their children, kind to their neighbors, conducting the business of life with the utmost propriety, and a great degree of pecuniary success; but, although they were totally unaware of it, their ideas and hopes traversed a very narrow range, bounded by a very high wall of prejudices, and they stood in awe of "Mrs. Grundy" to an extent

painful to be witnessed by persons of any independence of character.

Yet there are so many similar to them, that persons of this class generally run smoothly along the race course of time, keeping the ring without difficulty, and attaining the goal they have set up for themselves, — smiling, the while, at the folly of enthusiasts, and cherishing a holy horror of *isms*, as traps set to catch the unwary.

When Henry came near the academy, the next morning, he saw Ned Conant leaning over one of the posts set in the entrance to the play ground, surrounded by a small group of boys, to whom he seemed to be talking very earnestly.

"I wonder what he will say to me," thought Henry. "No matter what it is; I will have courage to do what is right; the boy's laugh shan't frighten me into disappointing Mrs. Avenel. But I wish it was over."

At this moment Ned saw him approaching, and called out, —

"Hillo, little 'un! I hope you don't mean to make me pay damages on those books that got their corners knocked off, last night, against my head. There can't be one of 'em fit to use again. I am sure there is full half the Latin Grammar in my noddle now, though the folks at home were busy all last evening picking the

pieces out of my skull. We sent out and bought a gross of nippers, and used 'em up, and got out all the bits except the Latin; that's there still: I was saying *bonus, -a, -um*, all night."

"I should think you had been saying *malus, -a, -um*," said Henry, joining the laugh the boys had raised. "I ought to be ashamed of myself for throwing the books at you, and I am."

"You feel as well ashamed as you do any way, don't you?" said Ned.

"No, I don't, either. The fact was, I was mad, or what you said wouldn't have made me so fire-ocious. One of the boys threw away my cap, at recess, and I was fool enough to be angry about it."

"He meant to make you mad," said one of the bystanders.

"I know he did," rejoined Henry, "and for that very reason I was the more a fool for feeling as I did."

"What are you talking about? Is Hen making a speech?" asked a boy who came up just then, with two or three others.

"I ain't, but I am going to; for I have about ten words I want you all to hear," he replied.

"Hear! hear! a speech from little Hen Lane," shouted one of them.

"A stump speech, 'thout no stump to it," said another.

"Who says I haven't my stump? Here's one from

the tree of knowledge," Henry said quickly, throwing down his bundle of books, and stepping on it.

The boys seized the idea, and a general tumbling of books succeeded, until the young orator was elevated on a pedestal, which, though a little unsteady, and not admitting of many gesticulatory flourishes, served to elevate him above the crowd which had gathered round.

There was a momentary bashful pause, and then he began, —

"'You'd scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage.'

But, ha-hum!" clearing his throat, boldly, "here goes! Since I have been in the school, some of you boys have somehow got an idea that I'm a nigger — picked up out of a sand bank — and you have taken particular pains to inform me of the fact. Now, I just want to tell you that I remember where I was born as well as you do, for I was there first, and upon serious reflection, I have come to the conclusion that I *am* a nigger, and probably always shall be."

"No, you'll be a colored gentleman, by-and-by," interrupted one of his hearers.

"Interruptions not allowed. I claim the stump. Mr. Chairman, please preserve order," said Henry, turning to Ned, who proceeded to shout "Order," and was echoed with such zeal by a dozen other voices, that order was some time in being restored. When they were still he went on.

"If any of you think I'm ashamed of not being white, you are much mistaken. I don't think my color is any disgrace at all, and I'm sure it is very becoming to my style of beauty! So you see the more you kick me, the higher I'll rise; for I can't help it if I am smarter than the rest of you, and I hope you'll try not to feel bad about it. If you kick me too hard, I may go up so high that I shall never come down again, — like the football that lodged in the belfry. Gentlemen and ladies, I'm done finished, and I thank you for the stump."

He jumped down as he uttered the last words, and Ned, throwing up his cap, called loudly for three cheers for "Hen, the boy that wasn't ashamed of himself."

The air rang with acclamations, and then Ned, holding out his hand to him, said, cordially, —

"My fine fellow, you've done just what I wanted you to, and I'm proud of you; and from this day out, if any body abuses you more than you can manage, just send 'em to me, and see if I won't give 'em fits, — that's all."

Henry grasped the proffered hand, and they went into the school house together.

This incident, unimportant as it seems, affected all his after life. The last bitter drop, instead of overflowing the cup, changed the whole draught into something healthful and almost pleasant. The new light upon the dark past, the opening of new hopes and aims in the future, the conviction of the possibility of strength and endurance, which the evening conversations had afforded his earnest and

thoughtful nature, never afterwards forsook him; and from the time of his boyish declaration of independence, his schoolfellows treated him in a manner quite different from that they had hitherto shown. They were sometimes petulant and rude, or teasing, as boys will always be; but a different spirit pervaded alike their quarrels and their reconciliations; and with Ned for his champion and friend, he had little cause to complain of the others.

CHAPTER TWENTIETH.

"Death! what is *death?* A locked and sacred thing,
Guarded by swords of fire — a hidden spring —
A fabled fruit — that I should thus endure
As if the world around me held no cure!
Wherefore not spread free wings?"

"What is it you are saying about Miss Helen? Tell me, Kissy," said little Emma Warner, pulling at her nurse's sleeve with childish impatience, as she stood talking in low tones with a fellow-servant, the morning after Helen had left the house. "Tell me what it is. What makes them all so sober?" she urged, as her words seemed unheeded.

"O, little pitchers!" said Kissy. "Go to your play, child. 'Tain't none o' your business."

But this reply, as might be expected, only stimulated Emma's curiosity, and she repeated, with the petulance of an indulged child, "Tell me — I will know — what did she go away for?"

"Go ask your grandma, if you want to know," said Kentucky, the wooden-looking cook, who stood by.

"She won't tell me if I do ask her. She'll only say, 'Little girls shouldn't ask questions.' That's what she always says. Just as if being little was any reason why any body

shouldn't want to know about things!" she added indignantly. "You tell me, Kentucky — won't you?"

"Ki!" said Kentucky, shortly. "Let 'em tell you dat's done did it, if dey ain't 'shamed ob it. De true fac' is, Miss Emma, dey's found out in dare," she added, pointing to the breakfast room, where the family were sitting, "dat black is jest as good as white, till dey sees what color 'tis, and den *'tain't good for nothin'*."

This oracular utterance did not tend to appease Emma's excitement, and opening her eyes in still further perplexity, she was about to demand an explanation, when Gus, who was sitting astride a limb of the tree beneath whose shade the group was standing, shouted in his shrill, clear tones, —

"'I know one ting,
An' I knows two;
I bet a nigger boy
Knows more'n you.'"

"Do you know?" said Emma, looking up at him. "O Gus, now do tell me if you know."

"Ki! bress de chile! Miss Emma, dat ar' Gus dono how ter tell de troof, if he knows oder tings; so don't b'lieve one word he gwine say," said Kentucky, impatiently, contorting her arms and body, in a vain effort to make signs behind her back, which might induce Gus to be silent, while Kissy added coaxingly, "Come now, Miss Emma, I'se gwine in de house — you come too."

"I won't stir a step till you tell me. I know there's something to tell, and you think Gus knows it, and you

don't want him to tell me; and that is just the reason I want to know," Emma replied, placing herself resolutely against the tree.

"O, you ain't good, Miss Emma," said the nurse, in a reproving tone.

"I don't care if I ain't good, just this once," replied Emma; "I get tired of being good all the time. Now tell me, Gus, do."

"Gus, ef you do tell, you'll get a floggin', sure 'nuff; for miss say she didn't want de chillen told nothin' 'bout it—say so *perticulur*," remonstrated Kissy.

Gus paused. He knew his mistress was in earnest in this request, but his love of mischief struggled with his fears. Presently he sang out again,—

"'We'se all in de dumps,
For di'monds is trumps,
De kitten is gone to St. Paul's,
De little chillen is bit,
An' de ma'am's in a fit,
An' *somebody's* house done got built widout walls.'

"Ha, ha!" laughed he, delighted at his success in adapting this old ditty, to suit the occasion—"ha, ha! I reckons *dat somebody* was Mass Hubert. He house done tumbled down."

"Gus, Gus, you 'll cotch it!" said Kentucky, menacing him; but he only shouted louder,—

"'One time I courted a handsome lass
As eber your eyes did see—e—e;
But now she's come to such a pass,
She neber will do for me—e—e."

"Gus, you done cotch it now, *sartin*," cried Kentucky, making an effort to get hold of him, which he eluded by springing to a higher branch, exclaiming,—

"Who scare? I ain't. Reckon somebody got to cotch *me* 'fore I kotch *it*. Dis nigger am mighty spry little feller, Kentucky;" and he snapped his fingers in her face.

"O, don't go, don't! Tell me before you go, and I'll give you something," pleaded Emma, as she saw him measuring the tree with his eye, and apparently preparing to ascend to its topmost bough.

"I will tell yer, Miss Emma, jest to plague dat ar ole black fool," he answered, pausing, with one foot raised. "De true fac' is, dat yer Miss Helen am nothin' but a nigger, and Colonel Bell done bought her, and toted her off. Dere now!" and with a triumphant whistle he disappeared among the foliage.

"What does he mean? Miss Helen a nigger!" exclaimed Emma, horror-struck at the idea; and in another minute she burst into the room where the family still lingered over their scarcely tasted breakfast.

"Grandmother, is it true—is it? Has Colonel Bell bought Miss Helen and carried her away?" she asked breathlessly.

"There now! Gracious goodness! who has been telling that child about it?" cried Mrs. Warner, shrugging her shoulders, and fidgeting in her chair, as was her manner when excited.

"How did you hear that, Emma?"

"Gus told me," she answered, abashed by the displeasure manifested in the faces around her.

"Gus shall have one good whipping then, before he is a day older," said Mrs. Warner angrily. "I'll see if I can't be obeyed in my own house."

"Don't whip him, please: it was I that coaxed him to tell me; he didn't mean to, only I made him," said the child, emboldened by her innate sense of justice. "But O, do tell me about it — is Miss Helen a nigger?"

"Hush, child — you drive me crazy!" cried her grandmother, shrinking at the sound of that word. But Emma persisted, and yielding to an irresistible necessity, Mrs. Warner looked doubtingly at her husband, as if to say, "Shall I tell her?" and replied in a calmer tone, —

"Perhaps you may as well be told about it, and that will stop your questions. It is true that Miss Helen belongs to Colonel Bell, for her mother was his servant; but you mustn't talk about it any more. We did not know it till yesterday."

"Why, how can she be!" exclaimed Emma. "I thought servants didn't know as much as white folks, and couldn't take care of themselves, and we always had to take care of them. Why, grandmother, Miss Helen knows ever so much — more than any body else in the house; and she can take care of herself ever so well. How can she be a servant?"

"Circumstances make a great difference. You can't understand how it is now, child."

"Why don't we always have these kind of circumstances then?" interrupted Emma. "I'm sure it is a great deal pleasanter. Miss Helen was so good and so handsome, and taught us heaps of nice things; and you never scolded me for any thing she told me, like you do for what the servants tell me. How funny that she should belong to Colonel Bell! I can't make it seem right, grandmother. I thought you said it was never proper for servants to know so much — how to read, and study, and play the piano, and every thing;" and the fair face was lifted in innocent wonder.

"Hush, child — do for mercy sake hush! You don't know what you are talking about. I wish I hadn't told you a word of it," exclaimed Mrs. Warner, in perplexity.

Emma stood beside her silently a short time, and then asked, —

"When will Miss Helen come back?"

"She isn't coming back again. Run and play now, and don't ask questions."

"But I must ask questions, for I want to know. Why isn't she coming here again? Is she going to live with Colonel Bell, and didn't she want to go; and was that what made her sick yesterday, and makes you all so sober this morning?"

"She has gone to stay with Mrs. Avenel — she wanted to go. You mustn't talk about it any more."

"But may I go and see her? Perhaps she is ill, and would like to see us. May I go with uncle Hubert when he goes? Will you take me, uncle?"

As she spoke, she ran to the window, where Hubert sat with his face turned from his parents. He had been talking with them when she entered. Her words stung him almost to madness, and at this moment he rose to leave the room; but she caught his hand, and repeated her entreaty in a gentle tone, that arrested his steps.

"So you want to go see her?" he said, bitterly; "*your* first thought is not to cast her off. Some of your elders might profit by the lesson."

He glanced at his parents as he said this, and his father answered, quickly, —

"What can that child understand of the bearings of this delicate question? Of course she loved Helen; we all did; but if she were older, she would see that our feelings should not lead us to overlook grave social distinctions."

Hubert made no reply, but sighing heavily, walked slowly from the room, accompanied by Emma, who still clung to his hand. When they reached the piazza, he saw that her eyes were overflowing with silent tears. He sat down, and took her in his arms. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"I feel so sorry about Miss Helen! I don't know what has happened to her; but I don't believe they will ever let me see her again, and I loved her dearly;" and the child hid her face on his shoulder, unable longer to control her sobs.

Hubert bowed his head till his face was hidden in her

curls; and when he raised it again, bright drops like tears glistened there. Here, at last, then, he had found sympathy; and though he made no reply, his little niece felt instinctively that from him she should meet with no repulse, and that her words had pleased him.

Presently the servant brought his horse to the door, as he had previously ordered, and kissing Emma, he placed her on the floor.

"Where are you going? to see Miss Helen?" she asked.

He nodded assent.

"Stop till I give you some present to take her. I love her. Here, take this; she always said it was pretty." She detached from her necklace a small cornelian cross, and laid it in her uncle's hand as she spoke; but he gave it back to her, saying, sadly, —

"No, that is an ominous present. She has crosses enough now to bear. Send some flowers, and I will give them to her; she likes flowers, you know." And as the child went to gather them, he said to himself, "I meant that her path should always be strewed with roses; but now, Heaven knows, there seem to be nothing but thorns."

When he arrived at Mrs. Avenel's, Helen was sleeping; and Mrs. Avenel having retired to her room to gain a little repose, he was obliged to wait some time before she joined him in the parlor. She was deeply affected at the sight of his haggard and disturbed countenance; but she

steadily refused to allow him to see Helen, whose life depended upon being kept quiet and free from excitement. When he became convinced of this, he ceased to urge her; but he shuddered to realize how dreadful must have been the suffering which, in so short a time, destroyed that high health, and those buoyant spirits, and brought her to the verge of the grave.

Hardly had he left, when his mother made her appearance, full of anxiety and pity for the unfortunate girl, but pitying herself very nearly as much for the mortification and perplexity of her own position, and fixed in her purpose to prevent her son from again meeting one whose power over him was still so strong. Indeed, on this day and those which followed, Mrs. Avenel found herself poorly fitted for the part she was forced to perform. Gentle, and too tender-hearted to endure giving pain to those she loved, and strongly moved by Hubert's passionate appeals, she was often inclined to espouse his cause, and, heedless of the future, insist that Helen should allow him one more interview. Yet when, in listening to his mother's arguments, she remembered the voice of public opinion, and sympathized in her intense fear lest Hubert should rashly brave that dread tribunal, her feelings were swayed in the opposite direction, and she would agree with Mrs. Warner that it was best on every account the lovers should be henceforth entirely separated.

And, kind as she was, and full of tenderest care for Helen, Mrs. Avenel was not exactly the right person to be

her sole companion in this hour of trial. Her meek and timid spirit cowered helplessly before the wild and reckless expressions of intense despair, which became more and more frequent as the invalid slowly regained bodily health; and her feebler nature could hardly understand the strength and power of those warring and tumultuous emotions, which exhausted themselves in paroxysms of tears, and moans, and fierce cries of anguish.

Yet her compassion never wearied; and though she yielded where another might have controlled and guided, her softness and quietness were sometimes inexpressibly soothing to the unstrung and tortured nerves that would have quivered beneath a harsher touch. She had a true womanly tact and delicacy, and she contrived in many ways to convey to Helen the messages, and letters, and flowers, which Hubert was continually bringing to her, without directly speaking of those subjects which she knew were too painful to be made the theme of conversation. She could not quite understand the firmness with which Helen refrained from returning any answer to these tokens of love; and one day, at Hubert's urgent request, she ventured to entreat something more than the simple thanks with which they were usually received. The unhappy girl listened in silent agitation, and after a little pause gave her a message, which Hubert received with bitter anguish; and after that he came there no more.

Three weeks had elapsed, and one day Helen was reclining listlessly on her couch, with her face towards the

window, and Mrs. Avenel thought from her silence that she was sleeping; but at length she asked, —

"Who are buried in that little enclosure I see yonder through the trees? There seems to be a gravestone within it."

"Have you never noticed that before? It was there
y dear to me, and who had suffered
I will tell you her history. She was
ever knew who seemed to me as unfor-
, my dear Helen," said Mrs. Avenel, in pity-

I buried
much.
d she found rest after a while. The unhappy do
the o…metimes, then!" Helen replied, with dreary calmness.

"She found rest before she died," said Mrs. Avenel, gently. "She was a sincere Christian, and her religion sustained her even through those dreadful trials which I thought at first would certainly kill her. She seemed for the last two years of her life almost as happy as I ever knew her; and her death was triumphant."

"Can such deep wounds close without a scar?" said Helen, musingly. "Is it possible to forget?"

"She did not forget — O, no; but she was happy, because she was resigned. When one has perfect faith in God, it is easy to submit to his will. Eternity seemed so real to her, that it was not hard to endure patiently a few years of sorrow, as preparation for ages of unending happiness. He who sends these afflictions has power to heal

the wounds they make. Do you not believe this, Helen?"

"I used to believe it," she said; "but now I see that it is not so. There are some wounds which no power can ever heal. The only hope is, that the heart will at last slowly bleed to death."

"My poor sister used to say, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,'" replied Mrs. Avenel, in tones of gentle reproach.

"Ah, if he would but slay me!" said Helen, with sudden energy; "it would be so easy to die! But now he rolls his thunders over me, but his lightnings will not strike."

"Dear Helen, you frighten me," said Mrs. Avenel, shrinking timidly from the wild light in her eyes.

"You needn't be afraid; I will not hurt you. I know you think I may go crazy, and perhaps I shall; but even then, I could not harm you, my only friend," said Helen, more gently.

"But I fear sometimes you may hurt yourself," said Mrs. Avenel, nervously.

Helen smiled bitterly, and sinking down on her pillows, closed her eyes, as if indisposed for further conversation. But she thought to herself how strange it was, that any one could speak of death as if its coming would harm her, when she had so longed, so panted to rest in the grave; and then a strong impulse seized her to take

into her own hands the issues of life and death, and boldly to force the iron gates, which would not open to her prayer of desperate grief. The idea had before crossed her mind, to be harbored for a moment, and then shrink away before the light of conscience, and the innate love of life which the first shock of sorrow could not break. It was strange that Mrs. Avenel's timidity should have been the first thing which provoked that impetuous nature to indulge the awful thought, and dwell upon it, until it took shape and form, and grew into a strong temptation. Yet so it was. Never until now had she realized how easy it would be to rid herself of these weary days and nights; and then she smiled again, as she remembered how carefully every thing with which she could hurt herself had been removed from her room during her illness. Her mind, warped and bent beneath the weight of her misery, awakened to a perverse desire for what was so fearfully withheld, and experienced a fierce delight in scheming, and planning opportunities to do the deed from which, in moments of perfect sanity, she would have recoiled with horror.

All the afternoon she thought of it, and all the evening, until her senses yielded to the anodyne which Mrs. Avenel administered; and when she awoke the next morning, the idea returned in still more attractive guise. It occurred to her that if she were to die now, before her brother knew any thing of what had befallen her, she might leave such requests and arguments as would prevent

her friends from telling him the secret which would wreck his happiness as it had hers. She could not help, could not save him, if she lived; but if she died, might not compassion and dread close every mouth? and would they not, in pity to her, leave him in blessed ignorance of the woe which had killed her. Ah, yes, it must be so. From the crash and ruin which had overwhelmed her she would save that beloved brother, to enjoy long years of calm happiness with the wife of his youth.

She knew where the medicines were kept, and she knew the key had been left on the mantelpiece for the use of her attendant, in case she should need any in the night. In the dim morning twilight, she arose without waking the servant from her sound sleep on the cot beside her bed, and with the key in her hand she drew around her a loose wrapping gown, and stole softly down stairs. Her bare feet made no noise on the matted floor, and as the servants were still in the yard, she met no one. When she returned, she had in her hand a large bottle labelled "Laudanum," which she hastily secreted; and then, overcome with fatigue at the unwonted exertion, she lay down upon her bed; and when the servant awoke she feigned to be asleep.

When Mrs. Avenel entered, with her kind morning inquiries, she was surprised to find Helen half dressed.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "you are surely exerting yourself too much. You have hardly walked across

the room yet, and you should not try to be so very smart as this!"

"I am better this morning. I have more strength than you think."

"Are you really better? You don't look much better. Let me see your face."

She threw open the shutters, and Helen turned her face to the light, with a wan smile that brought tears to the eyes of her gentle hostess.

"I am really better," she said, "stronger than I have been before since my illness; and to-day I must write some letters."

"Will you? Your brother must surely be anxious on account of your long silence. I would have written, but you were so unwilling."

"I was unwilling. What he must know I prefer to tell him myself. I have other letters to write, too. After breakfast will you send me some writing materials?"

"Yes, dear; but don't try to do too much. It is dangerous for you to make any fatiguing effort."

After breakfast the servant appeared with paper and ink, followed by Mrs. Avenel, who herself arranged the table and wheeled the easy chair to its place. She was glad to see in Helen these symptoms of reviving animation and interest in something beside her own thoughts; but she was still anxious lest this feverish energy might lead too far, and she repeated her cautions.

"Do not fear," said Helen, in a tone more cheerful

than she had used for a long time. And then, as her friend was leaving her, she took her hand, and added, earnestly, "Tell me, Mrs. Avenel, if you should receive a letter from one who had died after it was written,—before you read it, would it not seem to you like a voice from the grave? Would it not impel obedience, like an intimation from the spirit world?"

"I think it would. But why do you ask this?" replied she, suddenly alarmed.

"O, for nothing. Only I think that possibly I may not live a great while—perhaps not so long as these letters will be in reaching their destination."

"But you told me you felt better this morning."

"So I do. Why do you look so alarmed? This is only the passing whim of a moment. Go away now, my dear, kind friend, and leave me to write my letters."

There was nothing strange or excited in her manner, and after another scrutiny of her face, Mrs. Avenel's momentary fear was allayed, and she left her alone.

Helen spent a long time in writing, first to Colonel Bell and then to Mrs. Avenel, whom she begged, with all the arguments she could devise, to keep from her brother the knowledge of his parentage, or the cause of the sudden illness and death which she hinted would overtake her before these pages met their eyes. Then she penned a long, affectionate, and cheerful letter to her brother, disguising, with loving hyporisy, the trouble and terror of her soul; and then, with many tears and frequent

pauses, she wrote a few lines to Hubert, in which were poured forth all her passionate love and anguish, and besought him also to keep the fatal secret from her brother's knowledge.

She was deathly pale, and every nerve quivered, when she had finished, but her purpose did not falter; and when, after a few moments, she placed the letters where they could readily be found, and brought the bottle from its hiding-place, her hand did not tremble as she poured its contents into a cup which had been left upon the table, containing some beverage she was accustomed to drink.

She put the bottle aside, on a shelf in the closet, and then, locking the door, sat down with the cup before her. One look she gave at the familiar objects around her, and the blue, cloudless sky which overarched the sunny landscape without her windows, and then, shutting her eyes, she raised it to her lips.

At that moment there was a tapping at the door; the lock was turned, and finding it fastened, Mrs. Avenel said, in an agitated voice, "Helen, your brother is down stairs!"

She opened her eyes again, and set down the fatal draught. A look of deep disappointment came into her face, and with a groan she murmured, —

"He has come! Well, then, we can drink the cup of oblivion together. Poor boy! Why did he come so soon?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIRST.

> "There are some happy moments in this lone
> And desolate world of ours, that well repay
> The toil of struggling through it, and atone
> For many a long sad night and weary day.
> They come upon the mind like some wild air
> Of distant music."

THE hazy lights and the purple shadows of an October afternoon lay softly on the hills, and glorified with melancholy beauty all the fading landscape around her home, and the woodbine from her window cast bright reflections from its gorgeous leaves, over the couch where Charles Dupré's young wife lay sleeping. Very fair she was, but the delicate bloom of her cheek had faded, and the girlish grace of her form was gone; yet never had she been so dear, so beautiful, as now, to one who had entered the room softly, and stood earnestly regarding her; for the promise of a coming joy had invested her with the sacredness of woman's holiest dignities.

Presently he stooped down and kissed her softly between her eyes; and then how quickly those blue eyes opened, and two white arms, clasped tight around his neck, kept him prisoner till he was forced to kneel beside

her! Then, drawing himself back a little, so as to watch her face, he said, —

"Little Julie — guess!"

"Guess what?" she answered, smiling.

"Guess where I'm going."

"Going! going away to leave me?" and the smile faded from her lips.

"No — not going away *to leave her* — going for the sake of *coming home again.* It will be so nice to get home!" he answered, caressing her. "Won't you be glad to see me?"

"I'm always glad to see you — you don't need to go away for *that,*" she answered, in her soft, childish voice. "Every time I hear your step on the stairs I am all of a tremble with joy, and when I wake in the night I long for the light to come, so that I may see you."

"Silly little Julie!" said her husband, fondly; "why don't she light a match then, and look at him."

"She would, only she's afraid of waking him, and ——"

"It is too much trouble," added her husband, laughing.

"You needn't laugh at me, sir. I *am* glad when the daylight comes. Don't go away," she said, in a coaxing tone, that was almost irresistible.

"Dear little Julie, I am afraid I must go; I have half expected it for several days, but didn't tell you, because I hoped to send my partner instead; but this afternoon I have received letters which will compel me to go to Charleston."

"So far!" exclaimed Julie, piteously.

"I shan't be gone more than three weeks, and if you'll be a good girl, and won't cry, I'll bring home — what should you like best?"

"I know what you mean — Helen!" she answered, her face brightening a little; but it lengthened again, as she added, "But three weeks is such a long time! and I don't believe she'll come if you do go for her."

"O, yes, she will," said he, cheerfully. "I must go and see her, you know, when I am so near; and she'll be sure to come when I tell her how much we shall want her by and by." The young wife hid her face on her husband's breast, and a warm blush mantled her neck and shoulders, half revealed through their white drapery. Then their talk turned on other things. He was to leave the next morning, and there seemed so much to be thought of, so many things to say, before this first separation. They talked of the past, lived over again its hopes, its fears, and its delights, and wondered how there ever could have been a time when they did not love each other; and into the future they glanced with rapid, half-breathed words, dreaming dreams that were even more entrancing from the faint idea of uncertainty and peril which hung over them.

Twilight had gathered round them when the summons to tea broke in upon their sweet reveries, and they descended to join the family. Then the news of his brief

absence was communicated, and elicited various exclamations and remarks. Mr. Conant had some matters of business, that might be advanced by this journey. Nelly insinuated that the promise of a very splendid addition to her family of dolls would tend to reconcile her more entirely to his departure; and Ned suggested that perhaps a string of southern onions would enable her to cry for joy at his return.

"As for Julie," added Ned, "you had better take her with you, if you don't want her to cry her eyes out while you are gone."

"Take her with him, indeed!" said Mrs. Conant, her maternal plumes ruffling at the bare idea; "she managed to live sixteen years without him, and I guess she won't be such a little goose as to cry about an absence of three weeks."

Julie ate her supper with a very suspicious diligence, uttering not a word. She looked very much as if she wanted to be just such a little goose, in spite of her mother's cheerful negative; but she restrained herself.

"I suppose you will go up to see Helen, when you are so near," said Mrs. Conant.

"Certainly; I have promised to bring her home with me, to pay Julie for being a good girl while I am gone," Charles replied, secretly pressing his wife's little hand under the table.

"You unreasonable man! You can't expect to keep

such a promise. Isn't she to be married this month?" said Mrs. Conant.

"That was the expectation; but the time mentioned has nearly arrived, and as I have received no invitation to the wedding, I conclude it is deferred, for some reason. She wouldn't of course be so impolite as to be married without reciprocating the grand compliment we paid her last spring," he answered, gayly.

"It would be very strange for the wedding to be deferred. Don't you feel anxious lest something unpleasant may have occurred? When did you hear from her?"

"I have had no letters for nearly a month. When she last wrote, she was on her way homeward, with the Warners. It is a little strange that I have no further information; but I supposed she was very busy, and having other things to occupy me just now, have not realized that there was any cause for anxiety."

"I should be anxious, if it was *my* sister," said Mrs. Conant.

"I shan't be; I never found being anxious did any good. It may be that letters have been lost. We don't believe in worrying; do we, Julie?" Charles said, carelessly. "Ill news flies fast enough; and as I shall see her soon, it is hardly worth while to anticipate any thing very dreadful."

When Charles returned that evening from his counting room, he found his wife sitting in rather a disconsolate

attitude, before an open valise, which was heaped with clothing far beyond its capacity; and with a rueful face, she looked up and met his smile. "Was she tiring herself out trying to put five things in four places?" said he, lifting her in his arms, and placing her in an easy chair, while he went on with the packing.

"Mother wanted to do it, but I wouldn't let her," said Julie; "for as it was the first time, I wanted to put up your things myself. But I believe I don't understand the art, for you see how poorly I succeed. I never was good for much," she added, with a little sigh.

"You! you know how to make home happy, and that's worth every thing else in a woman."

"There, you've finished now," said Julie; "how nicely you have done it! Come and let us sit by this window a little while, in our favorite seat; I have been sitting there alone this evening, thinking how very, very lonesome I shall be while you are away."

They sat down together in the oriel window, at one end of their room. The harvest moon showed all the lovely landscape around, in a softened, shadowy light, more beautiful than day, and as its radiance fell over Julie's golden curls and pure, pale brow, her husband gazed upon her with an admiration not unmixed with fear; for that delicate and ethereal beauty seemed almost angelic.

"Are your wings growing, Julie?" he whispered, as he drew her still closer to his breast. "You look so spirit-

ual in this white moonlight that I am half afraid you will fly away from me."

"O, never!" she murmured; "if God takes me, — and sometimes I think he will, Charles, by and by, — if he takes me away from you, he won't make me stay in heaven all the time, and leave you here alone."

"Dear child, don't talk so," said her husband, his eyes filling with tears.

"I must; I want to now, Charles, because you are going away, and if any thing should happen, it would be a comfort to know that I had told you. Even now, when we are parted, when we cannot see each other for some hours, our bodies cannot imprison our souls so that they shall not commune together constantly; and how much closer their communion would be if one of us was purely spiritual! Death cannot part us, darling; for when I am an angel, I can *always* be with you, wherever you are."

"Death *shall* not part us," said her husband, with vehement earnestness; "but O, Julie dear, be a woman still. Don't be an angel."

With a burst of weeping, she laid her head on his breast, and for a long time there was silence.

"Don't cry any more, dear; you know it is not good for you," said Charles, at length, as he wiped away her tears.

A long sob heaved her breast, but she turned her sweet

face to him with a submissive smile, and, as a child might say it, she said, "I will be good."

"That's right, Julie," he said; "and you know you'll be so glad when I come home, that it will atone for the lonely hours of my absence."

"Perhaps so," she replied, more cheerfully; "I know I ought not to complain, for we have been so very happy, and this is the first cloud that has overshadowed us."

"And even the clouds have silver linings, you know. See how the moonlight penetrates and glorifies the one that lies yonder."

Julie looked at it a few moments, as it slowly sailed along the midnight sky, and then she said, "But we never see the silver lining of the clouds *until the storm has passed.*"

Charles did not speak for a little while, and then it was thoughtfully, as if rather communing with himself than replying to her.

"That is because we hide ourselves, and do not look up to the sky. If we would come out of the dark places where we seek shelter from the storm, and dare lift up our heads amid its fury, we should perhaps see light in the darkness, or at least we should see the earliest gleams of brightness, that now are lost to us."

"Yours is a cheerful philosophy; but, dear Charles, when the tempest beats upon us, how can we help bending ourselves to the ground, and bowing our heads, and shutting our eyes?"

"It is hard to avoid it, I know, Julie; and sometimes we do not open our eyes again when the fury of the storm is over, and so we do not see the bright prismatic colors that are a token and a promise to us from our covenant-keeping God."

Julie laid her head gently down again on his shoulder, and patting his face with her soft little hand, she whispered reverently, "You are so good!"

"It is getting late, little Julie; let us say our evening prayer."

They knelt together, and the still night threw her mantle over them like a benediction. O, in that far-off heaven, whence the solemn stars looked down so calmly, were there no angels, whose strong arms might turn aside from that hapless pair the sword of doom, even then uplifted to smite?

Alas! inscrutable are the ways of God. Let us veil our faces before his omniscience; for without faith the heart grows faint, and shrinks back from the vicissitudes of human life, hopeless and horror-stricken.

When Charles Dupré, a fortnight after this, arrived at Mr. Warner's house, he noticed a certain eager curiosity in the manners of the servant who ushered him into Mrs. Warner's presence, and her behavior was so cold and constrained, so unlike what it had been when on a former

occasion he had visited his sister, that when she told him that Helen was with Mrs. Avenel, and advised him to seek her there, he felt sure that something unpleasant had occurred to separate her from the family where she had lived so long. He left the house full of anxiety, which he did not feel at liberty to express, and which was increased by Mrs. Avenel's paleness and agitation, when he introduced himself, and inquired for his sister.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" he could not help asking, as she hurried from the room; but she felt wholly unable to tell him of the sorrow, which involved him as well, and hastened to inform Helen of his arrival. When she opened the door of her room, at the sound of her friend's voice, her face had a ghastly paleness, and with her long black hair hanging in dishevelled masses around her, she appeared like a mad woman.

"Tell him to come up here," she said.

"Not while you are looking so; you will frighten him," replied Mrs. Avenel, entreatingly.

"Tell him to come up; I want him *here*," she repeated, in a low, hoarse tone; and turning away without shutting the door, she sat down by the table, leaning her head on her hand. Mrs. Avenel lingered a few moments, but her gentle ministrations were unheeded, and bewildered and fearful, she returned to the parlor, and gave Charles his sister's message. He arose immediately, and followed her up stairs. "You will find her in great trouble; I am very glad you have come; we were about

sending for you," she found courage to say, just before they reached the door of Helen's chamber; and then she turned away, dreading to witness that meeting.

Helen had crossed her arms on the table, and leaning forward, with her face hidden in them, her hair unbound and sweeping the floor, she remained motionless until he came close beside her, and laid his hand on her head. Then she looked up, and he started back with an exclamation of terror. That death-like face, those pallid lips, those sunken, glaring eyes! Could this be his bright, beautiful Helen?

"My sister, what has happened?" he cried. "Is Hubert dead? But no; I saw his mother. Is it worse than that? Is he false?"

The blood that had seemed to be congealed about her heart rushed like a fiery flood over cheek and brow, and she answered, in a sharp whisper, —

"Don't speak of him, — *don't*. But it is not he; it is something worse than that. I could have borne it, if it were that alone, and never told how I was suffering."

"What then? O Helen, tell me! It is dreadful to find you thus!"

But she seemed not to hear him. An expression of bewilderment and anguish passed over her features, and she arose slowly to her feet, holding back with both hands the long tresses which fell like a veil around her face, and gazed at him so earnestly, so mournfully, that he was more than ever appalled. When she had stood thus a

moment before him, erect and breathless, she sank down again, murmuring hoarsely, —

"And you, too — you — and Julie — O God, was not *one* enough? Why must he suffer also? Why must he live to bear this woe?"

He heard her but indistinctly; yet her wild gestures told how suffering had unsettled her reason, and aroused an awful fear in his heart. Bending over her with endearing words, he pressed his lips to her cheek, which was white and cold as the cheek of the dead. "Helen, darling, why was I not sent for?" he whispered.

"O, I should rather ask why you are here now. My brother, my poor brother, go away and leave me. Why should you be involved in this curse? Go away, and never ask the cause of my misery; never seek to know my fate. Go; and then, perchance, you may be happy."

She withdrew her hands, and turned away, beckoning him to leave her; but increasingly shocked and surprised, he followed her to the lounge where she had thrown herself, and sitting beside her, he said, anxiously, "You do not mean this, Helen. You cannot dream that I will leave you in this condition, or ask no explanation of its cause. Tell me about it. Who should share it with you, if not your brother? Perhaps I can help you. It may not be as bad as you think."

"O, you cannot help me," she groaned. "Poor boy, you cannot help yourself."

Still he persisted in his inquiries; and almost impatient

in her misery, she sat up, exclaiming, "You don't know what you ask. *You cannot bear to know this secret,* which concerns you as much as it does me. I meant you should never learn it. I would have died, that it might be buried with me; and you have come so unexpectedly. Now you have seen to what it has brought me, be warned, be wise, and leave me."

Charles turned very pale, and for a moment he did not reply. In his anxiety for his sister, he had not before fully heeded her assurance that the trouble which had come upon her would affect him with *equal* force. But when he spoke, his voice was firm and his manner calm.

"If it is as you say, Helen, it is your duty to tell me. Any thing which can bring such consequences must be known sooner or later; and even if I was willing, it would be useless for you to send me away in ignorance. Do not keep me in suspense, for that is worse than all."

"It will part you from your wife — from Julie. Can you endure that?"

"From Julie! It cannot be! She is mine now — my wife; no earthly power can part us," he cried, starting forward, and then clasping his arms tightly over his breast, as if to hold her there forever.

"But they will separate you. They will never let you have her when they know all — never! never! — when they know your history and your lineage."

"What! what is it?" he exclaimed, as she paused; "for Heaven's sake torture me no longer. Tell me all."

"You are a mulatto. Judge if Mr. Conant will own you for a son-in-law! We are mulattoes; our ancestors were negroes; our mother was a slave, and our father was — her master."

She spoke rapidly, and her manner was abrupt and stern, as if every nerve and muscle, so long strained to their utmost tension, had hardened into stone. Even when she saw him stagger and sink back, like one bereft of life, she did not move from her rigid position, but sat watching him, without a word, as, after that momentary faintness, he gradually roused himself to realize the truth of what she had told him, and all which that fatal truth involved. He shrank in dismay before the thoughts which came trooping through his bewildered brain. His very soul seemed crushed and dying within him, and a wild, desperate determination possessed him to awake as from a nightmare dream, and find all this woe a vision. Standing up, he paced the room with rapid, uneven steps, wringing his hands together with a strength that almost dislocated them, and striking his head with his clinched fists. At length he paused suddenly before his sister, and looked fixedly in her face. She had not moved or spoken through it all, and now she returned his gaze with one that gave no token of sympathy or pity.

"It is no dream," he said wildly, as he met those eyes whence reason seemed to have fled. "It is no dream —

it is true; you must have been sure it was true, before your strong soul would have yielded thus. It is true; and O, tell me, Helen, tell me, how shall we escape? what shall we do?"

He seized her cold and rigid hands, and with an impassioned gesture, drew her to her feet. Her stiffened lips worked a moment convulsively, before she could speak; and then she said, with a ghastly smile, —

"I was just opening the door of escape when you came; I waited for you. Come with me, brother. There is room in the grave for both."

She led him to the table, and he yielded unresistingly; but when she took the cup, and turning again with that awful smile, held it to his lips, the spell of horror which had bound him was broken. He clutched it eagerly, and then there came a sudden reaction of feeling, and terrified at the murderous temptation, he fell on his knees and burst into tears. The cloud cleared from his brain; the religious faith and hope which was the habit of his life returned, and with a shuddering cry, he called on Heaven for aid.

His sister still held the cup, and looked down on him for a while with the same frozen glare; but by degrees the sound of his low, distressful moans, and his half-uttered words, seemed to pierce her dull ear, and rouse her to a sense of pity. She sat down in a chair beside him, and drawing him towards her, laid his head

on her bosom, and smoothed back his dark hair with the same caressing touch that used to calm him when a boy.

"Dear Charles," she said, at length, in a softer tone — "poor brother, you cannot bear it; I knew you could not. It is too hard. There is no room for us in all this world. There is no need of us. Let us hide our shame in the grave."

As she spoke she held the cup again to his lips; but now the first overwhelming shock of this woe was past, and he was conscious of a strength his sister had not. It was the strength of submission — the courage of faith. He took the cup gently from her hands, and still holding it, he said, "Helen, do you know what you are doing? This is murder."

"It is escape — it is rest; rest from this weary pain. O Charles, why should we not drink it? It is so dreadful to live! Born of the despised race, — the accursed race, — what hope is there for us in this world? Cast out, to be trodden under foot, — the Pariahs of the earth from its creation until now, — where did our race ever find sympathy or help? Where can *we* find it, any more?"

Her voice was low and faint, and she dropped her face wearily on her brother's head, which still rested against her bosom. He clasped his arms more tightly around her; and she needed his support, for she was sinking with exhaustion.

"O, to sleep! to sleep!" she murmured; "to sleep, and not to dream, and never more to wake! This life is too dark — too cruel for such as we are: there is no hope or refuge left for us."

"God is our refuge and strength — a very present help in trouble," said Charles, solemnly repeating the words which the voice within his soul had been whispering through all the tumult of his thoughts, with a power to sustain and cheer. But Helen only answered, more hopelessly than before, —

"God has forgotten us — he mocks at our misery — he cares for us no more."

"O Helen, hush!" said her brother, roused almost to forgetfulness of himself in his desire to comfort her. "Dear Helen, God is good. He has permitted this to come upon us, and he will give us strength to bear it. Like yourself, I shudder to look into the future, for we cannot tell what is before us; but I know — I *know* our Father in heaven will not forsake us. His hand will lead us every step of the way, and if we lean upon it, it will guide us safely through. We may be cut off from all happiness or help in this world, but in the world to come is our everlasting portion; and our joy, our help, our comfort will come from God."

But Helen only shook her head with a sad smile, and again held out her hand for the deadly draught. This sublime faith — this hope not born of earth — found no

echo in her soul. He saw it, and had recourse to other arguments. He spoke of the meanness of thus cowardly escaping from life and its burdens, and the glory, and strength, and stern joy of the courageous soul which triumphs over circumstances, and turns the course of destiny; but it was in vain. The thoughts which once would have stirred her like the trumpet call to combat, had now no power over her crushed spirit. But when he spoke of himself, and the trials and struggles of his future life, — when he referred, in brief, tremulous words, to the dreary loneliness of his lot, should Julie be forced to leave him, and entreated her to live for him who might henceforth have no other earthly friend, — her stern, desperate grief yielded to the gush of early recollections and the love which had from infancy been the strongest passion of her soul. Her bosom heaved convulsively, and her glazed eyes grew moist as she threw her arms around him, exclaiming, —

"O Charles, if you must live, I will. For your sake I can do any thing."

Her brother folded her close in his arms, and she felt his tears drop on her lips and brow.

"Promise me," he whispered, "that you will never do this again — you will never yield to this temptation of death."

"I will promise," she answered in a submissive tone, and for a moment lay quite still upon his breast. Then,

suddenly springing up, she seized the cup, flung it, with its contents, far out the open window, and throwing herself at full length upon the sofa, broke into a passionate flood of tears — the first she had shed for many days.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SECOND.

"So fade, fade on! Thy gift of love shall cling,
A coiling sadness, round thy heart and brain,
A silent, fruitless, yet undying thing,
All sensitive to pain!
And still the shadow of vain dreams shall fall
O'er thy mind's world, a daily darkening pall."

Mrs. Avenel heard the sound of Helen's low sobbing, and fearful that excessive emotion might induce another hemorrhage, ventured to intrude upon the brother and sister in their solitude. But the tears, which fell like rain, seemed to soften and relieve the oppressed heart of the unhappy girl, and her brother's presence enabled her to realize that she was not wholly desolate and without protection. She, being older than Charles, and in some sort the guardian of his youth, had never before thought of him except as a sharer in her sorrows, and an additional cause of grief in that he shared them.

But now he was the sustainer, the comforter; and she began to feel that the sole thing around which the tendrils of her womanly love could cling might be also a support in this hour of utmost need. She could not understand rightly the source whence his courage sprang, and she smiled piteously when his pale, quivering lips essayed to

utter words of hope and cheer; but it was something to know that his vision could discern a light in the distance, glimmering through the darkness, which seemed to her Cimmerian; and that, amid the hiss of scorn from a disdainful world, which had been for days sounding in her ears, he could distinguish a voice speaking of encouragement and honor.

By degrees her sobs grew less convulsive, and her face lost the expression it had worn of a hard and wordless misery, which had nearly destroyed her reason. Charles's first wish was, of course, to know the particulars they had learned respecting his birth and his early days, his mother and his father.

Mrs. Avenel told the story; but so tenderly, so delicately, with such consideration for the strange and peculiar circumstances which had led to this catastrophe, that if Colonel Bell had heard her, he would have blessed her with a grateful heart. She was naturally full of sentiment, and her compassion and sympathy were not confined to her own class. There was much to blame, but there was more to pity, and the latter was far easier for her to do than the former.

Helen found her hatred and anger against her father subsiding as she listened; and Charles, when he could command himself enough to speak, asked, in a tone almost affectionate, —

"Where is this Colonel Bell? I should like to see him. He seems to have had right intentions, though his plans

for our good have failed so unfortunately. Does he come here to see Helen?"

"He has been here several times since her illness, and expresses great anxiety about her, but he has never asked to see her since ——"

"Since when?" Charles inquired, as she hesitated.

"Since the first day Helen came here. I must own that there is something mysterious about his course; and though I cannot help being moved by his haggard face, whenever I look at him, I cannot justify him."

"What has he done?"

"The truth is this," said Helen, abruptly. "That first day, in the first shock of hearing this, my whole soul revolted against the expressions of affection which he used. I saw that he felt sorry for me, but I could not believe his sorrow was genuine. It seemed to me that he came there and stretched me on a rack, and then stood by pretending to pity my sufferings. I couldn't see why, as he had kept the secret so long, he could not then deny the report, if he really cared for me. After committing so many sins, one sin more wouldn't have signified much. I see you smile, Charles. Of course I know he *could not* deny, when asked directly, as he was by Mr. Warner; and by what he told Mrs. Avenel I suppose he knew the secret was in other hands, which would not have held it tight, if his did; and so denial was useless. But then I was unreasonable in my misery; and I think I was harsh to him, and let him see how I hated and scorned him, and

that I wished never to see him more. He was offended, I suppose; for the next day he insulted me."

"O Helen, after taking all this trouble for us, could he be so hard-hearted!" exclaimed her brother.

"I cannot help thinking there was some mistake or — something worse — about that letter," said Mrs. Avenel. "The more I think of it, the more I am at a loss to reconcile it with his conduct since. I must explain to you, Mr. Dupré, that the morning after Helen came here, Colonel Bell's servant brought a letter, which was directed to her, at Mrs. Warner's; but finding her here, he brought it over. When we opened it, we found nothing but a bill for twenty dollars, without word of any kind on the paper which enveloped it. Of course we could only conclude that he was angry, and intended to signify he would give her that pittance and leave her to take care of herself, as she had intimated to him she intended doing; and we resented the insult. But that very evening the colonel rode over here to inquire for her, and was so sad and agitated, that I had a great mind to ask for some explanation. Still, as he inquired about the letter without making any, I hardly liked to do so. In fact, I did not know what I ought to do — I am not fit to manage these affairs;" and she sighed, gently.

"Poor Mrs. Avenel! you will be glad when we are gone; I have been a great care to you, I know," said Helen, in a tone of self-reproach.

"O, no, dear! only I am afraid I haven't managed just right about this matter," Mrs. Avenel replied, eagerly.

"You have been my only friend; I can never repay your kindness," said Helen, mournfully; and again her tears flowed.

"But I may have made a mistake here. Do you think so, Mr. Dupré?" said Mrs. Avenel, wiping her eyes.

"I think there must have been a mistake somewhere," he answered. "If Colonel Bell had intended to insult you, or even to show anger, he would not have manifested kindness since then; and his previous conduct hardly makes it probable. If he has any real affection for us — for you, whom he knows better than he does me — he must suffer inexpressible mortification and pain in thinking of all he has brought upon us; and we must not refuse to pardon him," he added, with a deep sigh and a faltering voice. "I must see him when he comes again, Helen."

"I fear you cannot see him at present," said Mrs. Avenel, "for he has not been here this week; and yesterday I received a letter from him, dated at Charleston, stating that he had been obliged to go there on business, and Clara had accompanied him. They have been away together most of the summer. He inquires for you, too, Helen, dear. Here is the letter."

Helen took it, and when she read the warm expressions of interest in her, she was as much puzzled as her friend had been to reconcile what seemed so contradictory.

Then they talked of themselves, touching lightly on

the future, which might prove so painful, but lingering on their present situation, and consulting as to what it was best for them to do. Charles was anxious to return immediately, and take Helen along with him, to the north; and still he hesitated. He dreaded to have any rumor reach his wife or her family which might cause them to think he had withheld the truth, and yet he feared to have Julie excited and troubled in her present state of health; and if she saw Helen's grief-worn face, she must know what had happened. Mrs. Avenel could not conscientiously urge Helen to remain with her, for, understanding that her marriage with Hubert was impossible, she thought it best for them both to be widely separated; and, as his severe illness would detain him a long time in the neighborhood, she must leave it, if she would regain any degree of calmness and peace.

And Helen was eager to leave. She begged her brother to start for home the next morning, assuring him she would be ready, and that journeying was the only thing which could improve her health, either of body or mind.

"Julie need not see me," she said — "need not know that I went back with you. You can leave me in New York. It is uncertain where you may yourself be, when you have seen Mr. Conant and told him all."

"Why need he be told? why need any thing be said about it at present?" suggested Mrs. Avenel. "Why not wait until the announcement will not, at least, be attended with danger."

An expression of intense pain crossed Charles's face, when he heard their words; but now he replied, —

"That cannot be. I might hide it from Julie, if it were thought best; but I cannot deceive her parents while I live under their roof. They must know it, and I will be guided by their counsel in regard to their daughter. I must retain my own self-respect. I could not bear to feel that I was imposing a false character upon them, and receiving consideration which might not be given if the truth were known."

"No," said Helen, "we are low enough now. We will not be impostors."

"I can't think any body will respect you less than if your circumstances were different. You know, —

'A man's a man for a' that,'"

said Mrs. Avenel, making a faint attempt at encouragement.

"Nobody ought, perhaps — but every body will," said Helen, bitterly. "It is useless to try to shut our eyes to the fact. You know how widely spread and how deeply rooted is the prejudice against color. You know how every one shrinks from the least taint of the dishonored blood; how at the north, as well as here, people with dark skins are despised, if the shade is taken from the negro race: if it comes from the Spaniard or the South American it does well enough. It galls me to think of it, but yet I have no right to blame others. I

have felt so myself, and because I once felt so — nay, because I feel so at this moment — I know how we shall be scorned wherever we are known. O, why, why were we reserved for this misery? Were there not unhappy beings enough on earth before?"

"Hush, Helen," said her brother; "mourn, if you will, but do not repine."

"I will repine, I will rebel," she said, vehemently. "There is no right nor justice here — none, at least, for us. Don't think you can deceive me, Charles. Your very patience is more pitiful than if you sobbed and moaned as I do; and I know how the slow heart-breaking will wear you down. You do not realize it now; it is too new. Wait till you have borne it for three long, long weeks — borne it alone and helplessly."

"I shall not bear it alone," replied her brother, fixing his sad eyes on her face with an earnest and solemn expression.

"Do you think I can help you? O, *if I could*, this sorrow would be robbed of half its weight. Do you hope to have Julie with you?"

"I was not thinking of you, nor of her; yet I shall have help," he answered, in a strangely quiet tone, though his lips trembled as he spoke of his wife.

"Who will help you, then?" she asked, wonderingly.

"God."

The word came reverently, yet with a confidence that

told how entire was his faith, and how strong was its power to uphold.

Helen's passionate murmuring was quelled, as this conviction passed into her soul; and with an inward prayer that help and comfort might be given to her also, Mrs. Avenel stole gently away, and left them together.

Helen had been silent respecting Hubert, and Charles could not bring himself to ask any questions which it might pain her to answer. But as he sat with Mrs. Avenel that evening, after Helen's worn frame had found repose in sleep, he ventured to make the inquiry which, from the first, had been waiting for utterance.

Mrs. Avenel shook her head, thoughtfully. "I cannot quite make it out," she said. "Hubert Warner has been here again and again, begging and praying me to allow him an interview with Helen, and talking wildly of remorse, and a desire to obtain from her some word of pardon. At first, she was too ill; and since she became strong enough to bear the interview, she has steadily denied it; though I confess I urged her to see him, for I feared it would end as it did."

"How did it end?"

"He is very ill with brain fever. For several days they considered his case critical, and even now he is not out of danger. I suppose it all arises from his excitement and distress."

"Does Helen know it?"

"She does not. I had no courage to tell her. I knew

it might produce an agitation which would be fatal. It was easy to keep it from her, for she has never left her chamber, and makes no inquiries."

"But does she not wonder that she hears nothing from him? — that he has given her up so easily?"

"I think not; several notes passed between them, and the last time he came here, when he had read one she gave me for him, he broke out into such an incoherent strain of self-reproach, and protestations of love for her, that I grew almost frightened, and insisted she should see him. But she was more decided than ever, and at length said to me, 'Pray don't mention this again, if you would not see me more than ever miserable.'"

"'What shall I tell him, then?'" said I.

"'Tell him I will forget every thing but our early dream of love, which seemed so true; but I cannot see him. I have not strength to look upon his face, and hear his voice.'

"I cannot tell you the expression of her face as she spoke," continued Mrs. Avenel. "There was something in it which convinced me I did not understand all the mystery that passed beneath my eyes, and I determined never to urge her again in his behalf. It was noble in Helen to be so firm, since she knew it was best they should not meet again; but I could not help regretting the suffering it caused her lover. He went away like a man distracted, and the next morning they found him in a raging fever."

"She always had great decision of character," said Charles, thoughtfully; "but why do you suppose that Hubert uttered so many expressions of self-reproach? He was not to blame for this trouble."

"But at the first, you know, he might have shrank from her, in the dismay of this discovery," she answered, hesitating and blushing; "and perhaps his late repentance could not heal the wound a sudden word made then."

Charles did not reply, for the train of thought her words had awakened tortured his inmost soul. *Why* did Hubert Warner shrink from one to whom he had sworn such deathless love? And why must even gentle Mrs. Avenel think it was best the lovers should not meet again? Ah, it was then as Helen had said. She was an outcast; and he, her brother, shared the doom which cut her off from the sweet household charities, the loves, the joys, the hopes, which had been the delight of all their former days. And Julie — he did not wrong her so much as to suppose she could leave him; but would not she, too, be compelled to share the scorn and insult of his lot, if she remained with him? or might she not be torn from him by the strong and ruthless hands of those who would scorn him? He thought of her father's often expressed prejudices, and groaned aloud in anguish of spirit.

Mrs. Avenel had little to offer of hope or consolation; but her Christian sympathy was soothing to one who could as well as herself look beyond the trials of this life, or the secondary causes which seem to produce them, to

the sovereign hand which ordains all things, and can uphold while it chastens; which holds the balances of good and evil, and has the inconceivable riches of eternity wherewith to recompense for the transitory treasures of time. But his heart was very, very heavy, and full of anxiety, and racked with pain, and no sleep came to his weary eyelids. The gray dawn, as it broke dull and slowly in the cloudy sky, found him still at prayer, wrestling, as he had wrestled all night, with this strong Angel of Sorrow, who would not, alas! depart with the morning light.

But Helen awoke much calmer than before, if not less sad. The crisis of dangerous excitement had passed, and her eyes had lost the unnatural glare which looked like insanity. She was very weak and pale, but she insisted upon immediately commencing her journey; and as Charles was anxious to depart, Mrs. Avenel did not oppose her desire.

She would have accompanied her, but Helen would not allow it; for she was uncertain where she might think it best to remain, and she felt that the presence even of a friend would be irksome. She declared she was well enough and strong enough to take care of herself, and, with many misgivings, Mrs. Avenel bade her a weeping farewell, and watched the carriage as it drove off to take them to the railway station.

Few words passed between them during the journey

to the city; but as the cars sped along, they saw the pine forests whirl by as in a dream; for the thoughts of one were far away in the happy home, where soon the shadow of grief must fall; and the other recalled, with an aching regret and a mocking pity for her own blindness, the half-formed hopes and dim visions which had flitted through her mind when last she passed that way.

When they arrived at C———, the wind was rising, and the clouds, that had all day obscured the sunshine, were growing heavy and dark. Charles left his sister a few moments, while he went to look after the luggage, and when he returned he found her leaning against the window, looking very pale and much agitated.

"I don't know that we had better take the boat to-night," he said; "there is every indication of a violent storm."

But apparently she did not hear him; for, without replying, she grasped his arm nervously, and seemed endeavoring to direct his attention to a gentleman who stood near, with his back towards them.

"What is it?" said Charles, not understanding her.

"Look! that gentleman! it is Colonel Bell," she answered; and low as were her tones, they caught the ear of the person to whom she referred. He started, turned quickly around, and though he could not see Helen's face through her thick veil, he recognized her, and knew who was her companion. There was a moment of painful indecision, as he and Charles looked fixedly on each other;

and then involuntarily, almost unconsciously, Colonel Bell held out his hand to his son, but without moving from the pillar, against which he leaned as if rooted to the spot.

His paleness and visible agitation attracted the attention of two or three in the crowd that was hurrying through the spacious saloon, who half paused to give him a second glance; and a newsboy, thinking he wanted a paper, thrust one into his hand, with the stereotyped cry, "Thrip, sir; only thrip, sir; two for fourpence." This roused him to remember where he was, and in another instant he was calm and self-possessed, and his hesitation gone, in the resolve to make one more effort to win what he had well nigh lost.

He came forward with his usual manner, and grasped the unresisting hand of each.

"This is Charles —— and Helen," he said. "Where were you going?"

"We are on our way home," Charles replied.

"Don't go any farther to-night; a storm is approaching, and your sister has been very ill. Come to my hotel until to-morrow."

He looked at Helen anxiously as he spoke, for she was leaning back against the wall as if fainting, and the next instant her brother caught her lifeless form, as it was sinking slowly to the floor. The fatigue of her journey, and the agitation of this unexpected meeting, had overcome her enfeebled frame; but it was not long before she

revived sufficiently to be able to enter a carriage, which drove to the hotel Colonel Bell had named.

They had no choice now about continuing their journey; for during their delay the boat had left the pier, and they silently acquiesced in the arrangements which had been made for them.

The colonel did not ride in the carriage with them, but in another, which arriving before theirs, they found him waiting to receive them on the steps of the hotel. He said very little, but his courteous and respectful manner had in it an anxious tenderness, which told far more than words. Helen soon retired to her own room, and with great delicacy he refrained from intruding upon her in any way; but Charles, who desired an explanation and an acquaintance as much as his father did, found a note from him on the table in his chamber, when he went thither, after taking tea with his sister. An interview between them followed, in which all misunderstandings were made clear, and the father and son grew into a thoughtful and sad, yet friendly cognizance of all that each wished to know of the other.

But it was towards Helen that her father's heart turned most fondly. Her extraordinary resemblance to the lost Corilla invested his affection for her with much of the enthusiasm and romance which attended that episode in his life, and clothed the thought of her with something of the sacred fervor wherewith he had so long worshipped the memory of the dead. The circumstances under which

he had met her after many years of absence, the dread he experienced lest the catastrophe which had occurred should happen, had augmented his interest in her; and as he saw more and more of her genius and accomplishments during their summer tour, he had been conscious of a warmth of admiration and affection which made her happiness the chief desire of his life. This he had failed to secure — miserably failed; and his poignant regret and anxiety had deepened the furrows in his brow, and scattered the silver hairs more thickly amid his thin locks; but the suffering he endured only served to make her dearer. When Helen saw him the next morning, she was surprised to notice how old and care-worn he appeared, and she could no longer refuse to believe that he also had been involved in a strange net of circumstances, from which there was no escape, and that he had grieved scarcely less than herself over the wreck of her life's happiness.

It was a calm but very mournful party who met in Helen's chamber that morning, and their talk was low and broken by frequent pauses; for Helen was too hopeless, and Charles too anxious, for many words; and Colonel Bell, as he held his daughter's hand, and watched the passive despair of her wan face, seemed to feel all the weight of past and present sorrow pressing together upon his heart. Yet they were all thankful to know there was no unkind feeling, no cause for resentment, to add to the trials of this dreary time; and the colonel had a gloomy satisfaction in reflecting upon the summary revenge he

had taken upon the beautiful but malicious woman who triumphed in their misery. If any misgivings had previously been admitted with regard to the justice of the course he pursued, they disappeared forever when he discovered Clara's artifice respecting the letter; for he could have no doubt whose hand it was which had made him seem to insult one to whom his whole heart went forth in sympathy and love. By that last act his wife had sealed her doom. No prayers, no tears, no entreaties could win from him one emotion of pity, one relenting thought, after he learned that bold and cruel piece of wickedness, by which she had so nearly cut him off from the only comfort he might hope to enjoy in his declining years.

They parted at length, — those three so sorrowfully united, — for it seemed best on every account that Helen should be taken to other scenes, where new thoughts might occupy her; and if it had not been so, she could not have consented to leave her brother. Now that all was explained and forgiven, her father could endure to let her go, with the hope and the half promise that she would eventually acquiesce in the plans he had formed for their future life.

Little reference had been made to Charles's situation. In the uncertainty which hung over his prospects, it was a theme too delicate for discussion.

The sea was high, from the gale of the preceding night, and as the waves glittered and leaped in the sunshine, and broke in crests of foam upon the low islands of the

harbor, they seemed to Helen colder and more cruel than ever; as if their bounding play mocked her with the memory of the hour when she recoiled before the phantom of grief, and, crowned with a wreath of happiness and love, had dared to think she could measure the might of sorrow.

They arrived safely in Wilmington, and Charles was glad to find that the change and excitement of a rough night at sea had forced his sister out of the dull iteration of one routine of thought, and that bodily discomfort had in some measure, for a little while at least, abated the mental malady. She took more interest in what passed around her, and during the rest of the journey she was quiet and uncomplaining, never referring to her own case, and striving to rally and divert her brother from the extreme depression which gradually stole over him, as they came nearer home. Sometimes it seemed as if it would have been better if both had continued self-absorbed and unobservant, for several incidents occurred which touched them rudely. Conversations took place around them, and remarks were made to the servants, who, accompanying their mistresses, often sat near them, which reminded them of the light in which their fellow-countrymen held the race from whom they were descended. This might have been expected; but after they came into the free states, they were compelled to notice the manifestation of a kindred sentiment. The servants were no longer slaves, but free people of color were not treated with the respect

to which, in the Southern States, a slave is entitled by virtue of his master's right.

When they entered the cars, at one point of their route, they noticed a middle-aged, neatly-dressed mulatto woman, with a bright little boy beside her, occupying the seat near the door, which, extending around two sides of a square, afforded room for four persons. Gradually the car filled with passengers, and the train became crowded beyond its capacity. Every one had, from the first, avoided the front seat, which was nearest these persons; but at length, after a disdainful glance, and a hesitation that brought a deep flush over that dark face, two, who esteemed themselves *ladies*, condescended to occupy it.

No other seat was then vacant, except those beside the little boy, who, unconscious of his mother's embarrassment, was chatting as he looked out of the window, with occasionally a merry laugh. Still one person after another entered the car, walked to the end in search of a resting-place, and then, with angry and scornful glances into the woman's face, and muttered words of discontent, remained standing, rather than take a seat beside her. Helen watched the mortified and distressed expression of her features, till she could endure it no longer. She touched her brother's arm, and whispered, —

"Have you noticed that woman by the door?"

He nodded assent.

"It is thus they would treat us, if they knew who we were," she added, fiercely.

"Let us go and take those seats," said Charles, starting suddenly. "Would you dislike to? It would relieve the poor woman's distress; or, if you choose, I will go without you."

"No, I will go, also," said Helen; and as the seat was not far, the remove was easily effected, and the position they vacated instantly occupied.

Helen took a scornful pleasure in watching the faces of those who observed this simple deed. Surprise, slight self-reproach, indifference, contempt, ridicule, appeared by turns as her eyes moved from one to another; but when she looked at the woman whose claim to the common equality of a public conveyance she had thus recognized, she received a glance of tearful gratitude that made her own eyes moist. Still their troubles were not over, for two or three remained standing, whose murmuring it was not pleasant to hear; and when the cars stopped again, a young and very pretty girl, dressed in the height of fashion, entered trippingly, and stood with a slight frown at seeing the crowd before her.

Charles Dupré arose, and invited her to take his seat. Helen's face was hidden by a thick veil, and perhaps the lady did not know that she was not as dark as the mulatto beside her, for she elevated her dainty little nose with a toss of the head which shook all her curls and ribbons.

"You may keep it yourself, sir," she said, in no gentle tone; "I don't choose to sit with niggers."

Charles gravely resumed his seat without a word. The woman, who keenly felt her situation, had taken her boy in her arms; and now she bent down her face, and her tears fell on his curly hair. Presently she looked up, and said timidly, —

"I would stand and let the young lady sit down, but I am lame and cannot."

"Don't trouble yourself, madam," replied Charles, respectfully; "you have a much better right to the seat than the young lady has."

She overheard him, and coloring slightly, murmured something in which the word *abolitionist* could be distinguished, and moved away to the other end of the car, where a gentleman resigned his seat to her, which she took without a word of thanks.

Another person who stood near Charles Dupré heard his remark, and replied impatiently, —

"You may be correct about her having a right to the seat if she has paid for it, but I don't understand what right the conductor has to give her a ticket for this car. I think there must be some mistake, and I've been waiting for him to come along and put her in her proper place. I believe they don't allow niggers in the first class cars, on this road — hope they don't, at any rate."

This amiable conjecture was verified when the conductor came a short time after, and the woman was angri-

ly and rudely ordered to take her child and go into the inferior car, although she showed him tickets which entitled her to the place she occupied.

"There, now, we've got rid of the nuisance, and can take some comfort," said a large, coarse man, who took his seat beside Helen, and occupied himself in showering tobacco juice out of the window during the rest of the morning.

Helen drew a mental comparison between him and the neat, pleasant-looking woman and child whose place he had usurped, and groaned in bitterness and anger at the injustice she had witnessed.

Helen was very weary when they reached New York city; and as her brother's courage had utterly failed him to tell the painful news he brought, they determined to remain there a day, which would give Charles an opportunity to write a letter that would reach Mr. Conant a few hours before his own arrival home.

With deep dejection and forebodings of evil growing every hour more fixed and tangible, this purpose was accomplished. The story of his birth was simply told, with a noble candor which should have won for it a kind reception, and at the close of the letter a few pathetic sentences revealed what the effort had cost him. When he had finished, Helen proposed that he should go to find their old friend, Mr. Evans, who resided with his son, a little out of the city, in one of the great avenues by which New York is attaching her overloaded island to

the spacious main land; and glad of something that might make him forget himself, Charles consented, promising to bring her teacher to see her.

"Perhaps his kind, familiar face will bring back the thoughts of those old days when we saw nothing in the world but pleasure and success; and any thing would be delightful which could for a moment raise us out of the dead horror of the present," said Charles, sighing, as he rose to go.

"If it did not make the present more gloomy by contrast," replied Helen, echoing the sigh.

After a long drive in the crowded omnibus, and then a walk along a street where seemed to reign unmolested all the quiet which had for years been banished from the bustling localities he had left, Charles found the house he sought, and experienced the disappointment of hearing that all the family with whom he was acquainted were absent from home. After a short rest he retraced his steps, and having at length reached the region of such conveyances, established himself again in an omnibus, and took his seat in the farther corner, fatigued and disheartened.

Several persons entered after him as the carriage wended its slow way, and the seats were nearly filled, when some part of the harness broke, and the driver descended to repair it. During the momentary delay a colored gentleman, who had for some time been waiting on the sidewalk, came and opened the door, and pausing on the

step, said to the lady who sat nearest, "Shall I come in? Is there room?"

The lady moved along with rather an ungracious air; but the gentleman entered, and seating himself, gave one rapid glance at the row of faces opposite him, and then folding his hands on the top of a stout, ivory-headed cane, evidently made for use, he leaned forward a little with his chin resting upon them, and his eyes fixed on the floor.

He was apparently a gentleman in the best sense of the word. His dress and manners indicated refinement and a respectable station in society, and his clear, bright eyes and intelligent face betokened cultivation of mind and goodness of heart. The carriage rolled on, and he sat, still looking downwards. Did he purposely take that position? Had experience taught him that thus only he could escape looks which would be like dagger thrusts?

Alas for the Utopian dream of liberty and equality! Alas for this proud land, which vauntingly invites the criticism of a world! The plague spot is within its heart; the leprous defilement is upon its face. The toils and struggles of our fathers, the providence of God, seem to have raised it up only to be a mighty propagandist of slavery, and a dead weight upon the nations in their onward march to obtain freedom, and fraternity, and justice for all!

Thus thought Charles Dupré, as he watched the rising discontent visible in the faces of most of the passengers, as minute after minute passed, and he who was so causelessly obnoxious retained his seat among them. There were whisperings from one to another, and remarks intended to meet his ear, but inaudible amid the clatter and confusion of the street; and at length three or four pulled angrily at the check strap and flaunted out with a manner which spoke volumes of pharisaical pride. The gentleman appeared carefully to avoid seeing them, and when they had gone resumed his first position. Then several persons beckoned the driver to stop; but when they had opened the door and looked in, they closed it abruptly, and motioned him to pass on. Charles could imagine the reason for this, and at length the driver suspected that something was amiss, and twisting his eyes to get a view of the inside, he called out, —

"What's the matter in there? You ain't full, are ye?"

"Not *full*, but there's one too many," replied a bluff-looking fellow, with surly good nature.

"What's the matter?" said the driver again.

There was a momentary pause, for the omnibus was "stuck" in a jam of carriages, and the half dozen passengers who were left looked at each other, uncertain who should speak first; but the hesitation was terminated by a vinegar-faced woman, with a squeaking voice, sounding as if it had sharpened itself to a point with constant scolding, who exclaimed, "There is a black nigger man in here,

and I don't suppose nobody want's to get in. I wouldn't myself, if I hadn't got my baby with me; and I can't lug him through the streets."

"A nigger! Who is it? How came he there?" said the driver, in an irritated tone, bringing his mouth to the hole. "Look here, you, get out o' that!"

The gentleman had raised himself from his fixed posture as he heard this conversation, and now moving a little nearer the centre of the coach, he said, in a dignified yet beseeching voice, —

"I beg you to allow me to remain; I am not well, and it is nearly impossible for me to walk ——"

"When did you get in without me seeing you?" interrupted the driver.

"When you stopped to fix your harness. I had been refused several omnibuses, and I took the liberty to get in here without asking, hoping no objection would be made. I had walked from the lower part of the city to visit one of my parish, who is sick. I am a minister; I am not able to hire a carriage, and being very much fatigued and not well, I hoped to find some omnibus that would take me in."

"This ain't the one no way, then, for I don't take niggers into *this* bus. So move over and get out. You've stole your own ride, and regular cheated me out o' half a dozen others: pretty minister you are," said the driver, gruffly.

The gentleman looked harassed and extremely troubled.

At first he made a motion as if about to go, and then turning to the passengers, he said,—

"I appeal to you if this is not very unjust. What reason is there why I should not have a right to take advantage of the delay as I did, and use a public vehicle as any other man would, paying my fare when I leave it? I am a citizen of New York and a minister of the gospel, weary with pastoral duties, and unable to hire any other means of conveyance. I appeal to you if I shall not remain here."

No one replied except Charles, who gave an instant and cordial consent, expressing his surprise that it should be needed; and the man who had first spoken said, in his rough but hearty tones,—

"He's a very decent nigger. I don't think much black will rub off of him, marm, [to the vinegar-faced woman,] if he does stay a while longer. Go ahead, driver; we're all right."

"I don't move till that feller gets out," said the driver, with an oath; "and if he don't stir his stumps I'll find a way to get him out."

The gentleman made no further remonstrance, but paid his fare and left the omnibus in dignified silence.

"Do you know who that is?" asked Charles of a lady who had sat through all this, silent and expressionless.

"I'm not certain, but I believe it is the Rev. Mr. P.," was the reply.

"Why did he not tell his name? Surely it would have commanded respect," he exclaimed, astonished and indignant.

"It would have made no difference," said the lady, carelessly. "I have several times seen him refused a seat in the omnibus."

"O, shame!" Charles could not help saying. "It is enough to make one blush for his country."

The lady smiled coldly, and made some reply, of which he heard only a few indistinct words, about "distinctions of society;" for the "jam," which had detained them, suddenly gave way, and the carriage rattled on. But, as he caught that phrase, he remembered — O, with what revolt and sickening of heart! — that he also must feel the withering blight which these unchristian and inhuman ideas of caste threw over the most remote descendants of the children of Africa.

Long before daylight the next morning, the train started that bore Helen and Charles to the inland town, whither in all former journeyings his thoughts had turned with a sense of joy and security, as to a haven of perfect rest, a paradise which would ever remain blooming, though all the world beside should become a wilderness.

But now an angel stood at the gate of this paradise, armed with a flaming sword, beneath which he knew not if he might pass in safety; and like the first exiles he strove to turn his despairing eyes from its cold and fatal

glare. In vain! his thoughts would fly there still, even from the inward prayer whereby he sought to keep them stayed on Heaven; picturing the home he had left so happy, now shrouded in gloom, for his sake; and Julie's sweet eyes no longer smiling, but filled with tears of mortification and distress. Those four miserable hours! Years afterwards he recalled them sometimes in dreams, and woke quivering in suffocating agony, as if a strong hand had grasped his throat.

Yet, even in that dreadful time, his faith and his submission were not in vain; and in the midnight darkness, over the storm-tossed waves of feeling in which he was sinking, helpless and hopeless, came the radiant form of that Divinity whose feet once walked over the angry waves of Galilee, which grew hushed and calm beneath his tread.

The sun rose brightly in the clear and chill November sky, showing the trees stripped of their summer glory, and the fields brown and bare. Three weeks had made a great difference in all the familiar landscape about his home, and he felt the contrast between the autumn's resplendent wealth and the dumb poverty wherein Nature, stripped of all her treasures, awaited the fall of snow that was to cover her death. Ah, why could he not have seen, in the brightness of his own expectations three weeks ago, a foreshadowing of similar destitution and loss!

The train rushed on, through hill and over valley, through town and hamlet, whizzing, clattering, screaming, as if it rejoiced to know how relentlessly it bore him onward to the dreaded hour. Then its speed slackened, the bell rang, the steam shrieked franticly, the tramping of horses and hum of voices became audible, and a crowd of faces looked in at the darkened windows. They had reached their destination; and with limbs that trembled, and veins cold as ice, he gave his arm to Helen, and stepped out upon the platform of the station.

Immediately a friendly hand grasped his, and cordial tones of welcome sounded in his ears. He could hardly see the faces around him for the mist that came before his eyes; but he recognized the voice of Edgar Avenel, and heard his sister sobbing in Mrs. Avenel's arms. This kindness was so unexpected, and accorded with such delicacy and simplicity, that it instantly raised them from their despondency, and without hesitation Helen accepted her friend's invitation to go home with her. Having seen her thus provided for, Charles turned to go in an opposite direction. He preferred walking, that his arrival might be as quiet as possible; for he felt utterly uncertain concerning the reception which awaited him, and, divided between fear and impatience, the way seemed longer than ever before.

But the house was reached at length. He glanced up at the window of his chamber, but the face that always

watched there for him was not visible. He could not know that Julie, on her knees, was begging strength from Heaven for them both, and his heart stood still, as pale and faint he leaned against the door.

Had they all deserted him? He must know the worst at once; and with a desperate rousing of all his strength, he passed into the hall.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THIRD.

"Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth."

Perhaps Charles did not, in his letter, use sufficient circumlocution to prepare his father-in-law for what he had to tell; and perhaps, in any event, his indignation and amazement would have revealed the secret. Certain it is, that having taken his letters from the office at the coming in of the evening mail, he stepped into the store of "Davis and Dupré," to read them before going home; and, in the sudden shock of learning such news, prudence was forgotten, and all around became aware of his misfortune.

"Impossible!" "It can't be true!" "Horrible!" "Infamous!" were the exclamations which followed; and the half dozen gentlemen, who chanced to be present, clustered around him to hear the whole of the astounding letter.

"Shameful! my poor children! We shall never recover from this disgrace," said Mr. Conant, as he closed the letter and put it in his pocket, with the most extreme agitation.

"You will sue for a divorce immediately, of course," remarked one of his friends.

"O, certainly! but poor Julie — to have married a quadroon! O, horrible!" and he groaned aloud.

"It is too bad! It will break up our partnership — poor Dupré, it is hard for him," said Mr. Davis, who had till now been too much astonished to speak.

"Yes, you couldn't think of being connected with him now. But won't it be inconvenient to dissolve?" asked another.

"Very — but it must be done, of course — it wouldn't do at all to be in business with a *colored person*," he replied, with a blush of shame at the very thought.

"Why not," asked Edgar Avenel, who stood near. "In what has Charles Dupré changed since three weeks ago, when you were proud of his acquaintance, save in the noble courage to tell the truth at all hazards."

There was a momentary pause; and the gentlemen looked at each other, until one said, with a bow, half deferential and half scornful, "We all know your peculiar ideas, Mr. Avenel; but public opinion — the usages of society — every thing, forbids such a notion. Poor Dupré! it is a wonder no one ever suspected it."

"I have often thought the lower part of his face was slightly negrofied," said another; "but his complexion and hair are more like the Spanish blood, and then he is so intelligent and agreeable! Who would have thought it?"

"I ought to have been more careful in examining into his early life," said Mr. Conant; "but then there was no evidence; they tried once, and couldn't get any clew to their birth. And to think it should have turned up now, when it is too late! O heavens! what have I done, that such a horrible disgrace should come upon my family? We shall never get over it."

"Don't feel too badly, my friend," said one of the company, soothingly; "it will be a nine days' talk, but after the divorce it will soon be forgotten. Every body knows you were not to blame, and 'misfortunes will occur in the best-regulated families.'"

"No one will think any the less of you," said another, "but it is hard for your daughter."

"I declare it's a shame — a clear case of obtaining goods under false pretences," said another, carried away by his sympathy for his neighbor.

"Dear Julie — it makes me crazy to think of her," groaned Mr. Conant. "How shall I go home and tell them? And yet I must, for he says he shall be here to-morrow. The scamp!" he added; for his trouble was fast making him angry with its cause — "the scamp! I don't believe but he must have known something of this before! It is clear imposition."

The exclamation was followed by various surmises and conjectures of the same nature among the group, until Mr. Conant was half convinced that they were true. Mr. Avenel had vainly tried to soften their feelings, and de-

fend the absent. They regarded his views as utopian; and he perceiving that they were too much excited to see their own injustice, turned away, merely saying, as he left them, "I beg, Mr. Conant, that in this painful affair you will remember you have always heretofore considered Charles Dupré the very soul of honor, and that he loves your daughter more than his life. And you, gentlemen, consider that he is no less a *man*, because of the accident of his birth, and that your conduct towards him has power to wring his very soul."

He bowed to them, and passed out; and this appeal, which was not made dictatorially, but with a sad earnestness, for a few moments changed the current of their thoughts. But Mr. Conant was one of that class of persons whom perplexity and grief make angry, and it was with no very tender feelings towards his unfortunate son-in-law that he sought his own home.

When he entered the parlor, his irritated, fidgety manner at once assured his wife that something unusual had occurred; and Julie, raising her eyes to ask for a letter, received such a snappish reply, that she shrank back in wonder, and resumed her work.

That delicate little piece of work! Nelly had been told it was a short gown for the cat, and had innocently wondered that sister Julie should take such pains to embroider it, when pussy would be sure to tear it off immediately, as she always did the doll's clothes, in which she was sometimes dressed; and Ned, the teasing, inquisitive

Ned, had been shown how all the corners would fit together, and be a complete night cap, with the addition of some part yet to be cut out. But Julie alone knew how many flowers of fancy had been woven into that fine embroidery, or how many hopes and wishes might be counted for every stitch of that dainty sewing.

"What is the matter with you, Mr. Conant?" said his wife, at length, when he had remained some time looking moodily into the fire, without speaking.

"I have heard some bad news," said he, in a low tone.

His wife glanced anxiously towards Julie, and made a sign for him to be silent; but her quick ear had caught the meaning of his words, and she exclaimed, —

"Bad news! O father, is it about Charles? It is, I know by your looks. Is he sick? is he ——" She could not speak the fatal word, which died on her lips, but she sank back in her chair, so faint and tremulous, that her mother said, in alarm, "How could you be so thoughtless, Mr. Conant? Do tell, now, for suspense is worse than any thing."

"He is not sick, or dead," said Mr. Conant, with a sigh: and he moved uneasily in his chair, with his eyes fixed on his daughter.

"But something has happened — some accident; it is about him, I know, or you would not look at me so;" and as she spoke, she clasped her hands, beseechingly.

"No, there has been no accident; I have had a letter

from him, and he will be here to-morrow. Dear child, I don't know but it would be better for you if he were not coming," said her father. The poor man was almost distracted with apprehension, and his strange manner frightened her even more than his words.

"Do speak, and tell what the matter is," said Mrs. Conant, anxiously. "You will put the child into fits, if you keep on so. It can't be any thing very dreadful, if he is well, and will be here to-morrow. How oddly you act! Was the bad news in his letter?"

He looked at her gloomily a moment, for her tone of vexation annoyed him, and then he answered, —

"Yes, you may as well know it first as last. He has found out all about himself since he has been down there, who his parents are, and all."

"Who are they?" exclaimed both his listeners, in one breath.

"That is the misery of it. I don't know how you will bear it, but you must try and be as calm as you can."

"I don't care who they were," cried Julie; "it won't make any difference to me."

"Poor child, you don't know — you will never imagine the shame and the disgrace of it. I don't know how to tell you. His father was a gentleman, but his mother — their mother, for Helen is really his sister — was a slave."

"Mercy," screamed Mrs. Conant, grasping his arm; "you don't mean a *real* slave, a nigger!"

"Yes, a mulatto woman; ain't it dreadful?" And he buried his face in his hands, with a deep groan.

"Poor Charles! poor Helen! how badly they must feel!" said Julie, simply; "that is the reason I haven't had a letter since he left Charleston. Dear Charles! I'm glad he's so near home."

"You little ignoramus," said her father, starting with indignation to see her receive these tidings so differently from what he had expected; "you needn't go out of your way to pity *them*. There's your father, and mother, and your whole family, disgraced forever; and you, poor miserable girl! how will you ever dare look any body in the face again? I expected it would almost kill you."

"I am sorry, very sorry," said Julie, with gentle earnestness; "for I see you and mother are so annoyed, and I know it will be a sort of mortification to the children, when they first hear of it; people may laugh at them about it."

"I hope you didn't tell any one of it," interrupted her mother; "we might keep it hushed up, and nobody will know it."

"Unfortunately, I was so astonished I let the secret out before I thought; so it is too late for that," said Mr. Conant; and his wife turned away with an exclamation of distress.

"Why should it make any difference?" urged Julie; "people won't think any less of him, though they may be sorry for him."

"You little goose," said her father. "You poor child,

are you really so simple as not to see the difference it will make? When did you ever see a mulatto received into good society, and treated as an equal?"

"But Charles is not like *them*," said Julie, blushing, with tearful eyes, at this allusion to her husband. "Every body knows Charles, and likes him; and he is so handsome, and so good, and so intelligent. O, it *can't* make any difference."

"My poor child, you'll find it will make all the difference in the world," said her mother, sadly. "It makes it no better that he has always been thought white, for people will be ashamed to think they have been imposed upon. No, it is an awful misfortune. I don't know what we shall do."

"It is a misfortune because you feel so about it," said Julie, coloring still more deeply, while her blue eyes flashed, and her whole face assumed a look that was almost defiant. "But I don't care about it — I *don't*: my husband is his own noble self, and never imposed upon any body. Just as soon as he found this out, he told of it, though he might have concealed it, and I honor him the more for it; and I don't care what the world says or thinks; he's as good as any body, and I love him better than ever, and I'm glad he's coming home to-morrow, that I can tell him so."

"No you won't, child," said her father, interrupting her; "do you suppose he is going to continue a member of my family? No, he has disgraced us enough already.

You, poor child, will never be able to hold up your head again, after having had a quadroon husband, and a child with his blood in its veins;" and he groaned again as he thought of it. "But I won't have the disgrace and the curse continued, to be a lasting reproach to your little sister, and blast your brother's prospects —— "

"Hush, husband: you have no consideration," said Mrs. Conant, placing her hand over his mouth, with a warning gesture; for Julie had become so pale that she feared a fainting fit. "Don't mind him, Julie, dear; and you had better go up stairs and lie down; you're getting too much excited," she added, as she poured out a glass of water and held it to her daughter's lips. But she put the glass away, and though tears were running over her cheeks, and she trembled in every limb, her voice was firm, as she said vehemently, —

"You are cruel! you are unjust! but you can never make me ashamed of him — never — never. He is my own dear, noble husband, and God has joined us together, and I will cling to him till death parts us."

"Hush, darling, hush: you will make yourself sick. Go up stairs and keep quiet;" and as she spoke Mrs. Conant drew her to the door, and went up with her to her own room.

"I had rather be alone, now," she said, in a choked voice, and her mother kissed her tenderly and went away.

Alone! Ah, in that chamber where she had passed so many, many happy hours with Charles, she could not be

wholly alone, for the tokens of his presence were always near. There were his books, — one on the table, open at the place where they were reading together the day before he left, — and on the cushion of the oriel window where they sat so long together, that last happy evening, was his dressing gown, just where he had thrown it when he took it off; for she had not allowed it to be removed. Her eye rested on it now, and she flew across the room, and fell down beside it, gathering it to her bosom with gushing tears.

"O, darling, precious husband," she cried, "they shall never make me leave you; you are my own — mine always! O God, pity us! — help us!" and her sobs and tears came thicker and faster, till, exhausted with emotion, she found relief in sleep.

Mrs. Conant returned to the parlor, where her husband was pacing the room in an agitated manner, and throwing herself into an easy chair, she wept silently for a long time.

"This is a most distressing business," said her husband, pausing at last, and seating himself beside her.

"It is, indeed," she answered; "what shall we do?"

"Do! There is but one thing to do; we must get them divorced as soon as possible, and then we can move away from here. In a new place the other children will not be taunted with poor Julie's misfortune."

"But then, to think of her situation — to think of what is coming!"

"Death may relieve us of that addition to our troubles," said Mr. Conant, moodily.

"Why, husband," ejaculated Mrs. Conant, "your own child! can you wish her dead?"

"No, not my child, but hers. O heavens! how will she ever bear such shame and sorrow. She is but a frail little creature at best, and she will have every thing to endure at once."

"It does seem too bad. Why couldn't you have kept it to yourself for a while? and then we might have arranged things quietly by and by."

"It is no use to blame me for that now. I regret it as much as you do, but I was so confounded that I told the whole before I knew what I was doing. Here is the letter."

She read it, and then laying it down with a sigh, said, "Poor Charles! he has acted nobly about it, and it is enough to break one's heart to think of him and his sister. What an unendurable thing it is for us all!"

"I suppose I am unfeeling," replied her husband, "but it makes me angry to think of him. It seems as if he *might have known*; he certainly couldn't have forgotten every thing about his childhood — nobody does."

"He was very young when he came north, and after that there was nothing to keep alive early memories," said Mrs. Conant, gently. "What are you going to do to-morrow, when he comes?" she added, after a pause.

"Send him away as fast and as far as possible," replied

he, with stern determination. "I suppose I may have some trouble, but he *shall not* have any thing more to do with Julie."

"It will kill her," said his wife, anxiously.

"Well, let it. Yes," he added, as she made an exclamation of horror, "I believe I had rather follow her to her grave than have it known openly that she was living with him. Think of it, wife! It is amalgamation! Think what a disgrace it would be to the other children. It would entirely spoil their prospects in life. For their sakes we ought to prevent it, let it cost what it may."

"But Charles is so handsome, and has so *little* negro blood in him," pleaded his wife.

"He has enough to damn him," answered Mr. Conant. "No, wife, I tell you it won't do. The gentlemen who were talking about it this afternoon all agreed that this was the only thing I could do. It seems severe now, but it will be best in the end, and we must consider the other children. Where are Ned and Nelly?"

"He took Nell over to Melton to see my sister, and said they shouldn't be at home till to-morrow night. I am glad they are gone just now."

"So am I. I wish to-morrow was over. When you take up Julie's tea you must talk with her, and try to get her to take a sensible view of the matter. Tell her how wrong such marriages are, and what a curse and trouble they always bring. Of course she will feel dreadfully at first; but I think after a time she may become calmer

about it; and she knows nobody loves her more than you and I do, and we will devote ourselves to making her happy."

More conversation of this kind followed. Mrs. Conant felt less bitterly towards Charles than her husband did, and had some misgivings about the necessity of the stern measures which he considered the only alternative; for her heart yearned towards her daughter, and sympathized in some degree with her unhappy love; but still her pride was deeply wounded by the thought of what the world would say at this discovery, and she blushed to think that her child should, even innocently, have made such a *mésalliance.* When Julie's tea was carried to her, Mrs. Conant followed, and tried to fulfil her husband's wishes, in convincing her that his views were correct. The young wife heard all in silence. She was calm enough now, but very pallid and sad, and there was something in her face which made her mother feel that all her words were wasted.

She allowed herself to be undressed, and went unresistingly to bed, but when urged to permit some one to sleep with her, she begged so earnestly to be left alone, that Mrs. Conant at length consented, and went away with a heavy heart.

Minute after minute, hour after hour, that slow night lagged along its course, and still that white form lay motionless, those small hands crossed, and those blue

unsleeping eyes wide open; and ever and anon the angels who watched around her heard her say, in her sweet, childish voice, "I must be very calm and patient, for to-morrow Charles will be here, and I shall need all my strength to help him."

The morrow came. Charles Dupré stood face to face with the father and mother of his wife, and for a moment the stern mortification and anger of the former were subdued by the sight of his sad face — pale, agitated, and yet lighted by a certain loftiness of purpose, that involuntarily claimed respect. They were all so much excited that for a time neither spoke. Then Charles asked, in a tremulous voice, "Where is my wife?"

"Julie is up stairs," replied Mr. Conant, in a tone which he in vain tried to render firm; and her mother, out of the pity of her heart, could not help adding, —

"The cars are in early this morning. She did not expect you so soon."

Charles made a quick step forward, and grasped her passive hand, — trembling so much in the reaction of feeling that he could hardly stand. He thought he had mistaken the coldness of his first reception. Julie did not mean to desert him — they did not intend to disown him!

Mr. Conant read the meaning of the light which broke over his face, and as he was turning away to seek his wife, rose suddenly, and stood between him and the door.

"We pity you, Charles," he said; "we have appreci-

ated the nobleness of your conduct in this painful matter; but I am sure you must feel that you cannot possibly expect to stand on the same footing you have hitherto in my family."

Charles leaned heavily against the mantel-piece, near which he stood, and the faintness returned as these cold, ominous words met his ear. But he rallied after a moment, and said, calmly, —

"I suppose I ought not to expect it. I know the prejudices of society against the unhappy race with which I am connected through my unfortunate mother; and I hardly dared hope that even the habit of years, and your perfect knowledge of me, could overcome your horror of this blot. I am ready to go far hence, where I can never be known as having been honored with your friendship. But Julie: I must know how she feels; I must see her first."

"Julie is a mere child; she don't know what is best for her; and in her present situation I cannot have her excited, as she will be, if she sees you."

"Not see her! not see my wife," exclaimed Charles, in a sharp, agonized tone. "This passes my worst fears. You cannot mean to be so cruel."

We have said that Mr. Conant always became angry when his feelings were excited by grief, and now he was in the mood to be exceedingly irritated by this reply.

"No, sir," he said, sternly, "you shall not see her; and what is more, you shall leave this house directly, never to enter it again;" and he pointed to the door.

"Does she know of this? does she wish it?" asked the miserable man, in a low voice. But before any one could reply there was a quick step in the hall, and through the half-open door Julie flitted into the room, silent and white as any snow wreath, in her loose muslin dress, and without a word cast herself into her husband's open arms. For a few moments none of that group spoke or moved. Mrs. Conant buried her face in her hands, with a low cry. Charles's face was bowed down and hidden in the golden ringlets that lay on his breast, and his arms clasped close, close, as if they could never again relinquish that quivering, sinking form.

"Charles, dear Charles, I love you better than ever; I will never leave you," she whispered at length.

"God bless you, Julie," he murmured, and the hot tears fell upon her upturned face.

Presently her father stepped forward, and laid his hand on her arm, which was around her husband's neck. His grasp was gentle, but firm, and though his voice was husky it was very stern.

"Julie, this must cease. Go to your room, my child."

She turned her face to him, and he was startled to see how the childish look was gone. It was a woman's face, dignified and determined, and slightly worn with this sudden pressure of care.

"Father," she said, in a voice decided as his own, "you must not say that again; you must not tell me to leave him. I am his wife."

"I deny it; he married you under false pretences; I will procure a divorce this very month; and if there is the honor of manhood in him, he will be satisfied with the misery he has caused, and the disgrace he has brought upon us all, and take himself away where his base blood won't be a continual reproach to us."

"Send him away if you will," said Julie, recoiling a little before her father's angry eyes; "but wherever he goes, I go with him."

"Hear me a moment, I pray," exclaimed her husband, as Mr. Conant was about to reply; "I came here fully resolved to submit to whatever fate might be ordained for me. For myself I feel not one atom less of self-respect than before this secret of my birth was known; but I remembered your prejudices, I knew the injustice of society, and I expected to find you overwhelmed with mortification. I thought you might desire me to remove somewhere else, that my connection with you might be sooner forgotten. But I did not expect to be received more in anger than in sorrow; I did not expect to be insulted for my misfortunes; I did not expect that you could at once forget I had been to you as a son, and had honored you as a father. If Julie had shared your feelings, if she had even for a moment been ashamed of me — I would have left you in silence. But now that I know her heart is unchanged, I must try to defend myself from these extreme measures. I appeal to your own generosity and

kindness, whether they are not too hard. In what am I changed? Have I not the same form and face, the same heart and mind, the same affections and passions, as if I were indeed the white man you thought me? What right has this Moloch of public opinion to demand that all I hold dear shall be sacrificed to its burning hate? If the blood of my ancestors is of moment, why should not that I received from my father's side count for something? O, mockery of justice! that robbed my mother of a woman's right, a woman's honor, and curses her child for the stain!"

He paused, overcome by emotion, of which his flashing eyes and crimson cheek gave token; and Mr. Conant replied, more calmly than before, but not less peremptorily, —

"I see that you are unfortunate, but I cannot see the injustice. The laws of social life are right upon the whole, though they press hardly in some cases. You are a sensible man, and you have seemed to regard the welfare of my family. Now, you must know that we cannot, without eternal disgrace, acknowledge you."

"I do not ask you to," replied Charles; "only do not drive me away with anger and contempt. If Julie will go with me, let us go in peace; and we will honor you with love and gratitude all the days of our lives, but we will never trouble you again."

"And what should I say to those who asked me where my eldest daughter was? Do you suppose I will allow

the other children to be disgraced by countenancing such a marriage? Do you suppose your children shall ever call me grandfather? Never. I don't see where your affection for Julie is, that you even think of taking her from such a home as she has here, to share such a life as yours will be. You must be very selfish."

"If I had known this before I was married — before I was engaged to Julie — I would sooner have died than propose such a thing," said Charles, with strong emotion. "But now, God knows, I would not drag the star of my idolatry down to my own dark sphere, did I not feel assured that I can be more than all the world beside could be to her. I am not penniless, and we will go where nobody shall taunt her with her husband's birth, and live secluded and happy. O Mrs. Conant," he added, "plead for us; I know you must pity us. If your husband will only consent to this, all may yet be well."

Mrs. Conant, who still sat with her face bowed on her hands, looked up as she heard this passionate appeal, and tried to speak; but her intense excitement caused such a paroxysm of weeping that she was unable to utter a word. Her husband also was affected, and for a moment his resolution wavered. But then there came the phantom sound of "the world's dread laugh," the recollection of what had been said the night previous, and his own deep-rooted prejudice against the colored race; and determined to end the scene, he said, in a quick, harsh tone, —

"You have said enough. You may go."

"And Julie?"

"My curse shall cling to her forever if she goes with you," exclaimed Mr. Conant, seizing his daughter's hand.

Trembling and horrified she left her husband's arms, and sank helplessly at his feet, still holding his hand with both of hers, and crying, "O, no, father — you don't mean that — your poor little Julie! You don't mean those dreadful words!"

"Will you leave him?"

"I cannot — I must not — but, O father" — her voice died in a convulsive sob; and now her mother came forward, exclaiming, —

"This will never do — it will kill her. Charles, you must go for the present, certainly: Julie, dear, you will let him, won't you?"

Charles had raised, and was half supporting his wife, still clinging to her father's hand, her agitation becoming every moment more intense. He saw that it was dangerous, and said, doubtingly, —

"Shall I go, dear? Had I better go?"

"No, no. Not without me. They shall never, never part us."

"Come with me, then," he said, and bore her half fainting to the hall.

But as he stopped to wrap a shawl about her, Mrs. Conant followed, and her father interfered.

"Charles," he said, "your wife is a mere child, and don't know what is best, and I have had no time to

explain to her my wishes or my views. You will be doing a great wrong if you take her away now, in the first passion of this discovery, when she has had no chance to count the cost of the sacrifice she makes; and I cannot consent to it. If she goes now, she goes with a father's anger clinging to her. But if you will leave her till I have talked with her, and am convinced that she will really be happier with you than we can make her here, why, then you may come and take her; and though I will never see you again, I will not curse her for the disgrace she brings me."

Charles looked at the poor child he held in his arms, already too much exhausted by the scene she had endured, and after a little pause he yielded his wishes to his fears and his sense of right.

"Will you stay, darling?" he whispered.

"Must I?" she said.

"I am afraid you ought," he answered, reluctantly; and after a slight struggle with herself, she consented.

"But you will come back to-night," she added.

"To-morrow is soon enough," said Mr. Conant.

"O, no, to-night — I can't bear another such night as the last was," she pleaded, growing very pale.

"Well, well! Any thing, if you will go now," said Mr. Conant, impatiently.

As Charles bent over his wife, with a lingering embrace, she whispered softly in his ear, "Don't be afraid — when you come, I will go away with you;" and then, as

he raised himself, she said aloud, with one hand lifted to heaven, and a strange awe on her fair young face, "May God do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

How often they had chanted those words together in other days! How little they had thought ever to hear them spoken thus!

Charles gave his hand to Mrs. Conant, who clasped it warmly: he then turned to her husband; but he stepped back, exclaiming, sternly, "Never, sir!" and when Charles had gone, he closed the door, and locked it.

May God forgive him; he only meant to separate them.

As Mrs. Conant was going up stairs with Julie, he called her back, and said, "Be sure the child don't come out of her room to-day. He shall never see her again in this world; so help me Heaven!"

In his excitement, he spoke louder than he intended. Julie heard him, and without word or sound fell senseless on the floor.

When Charles Dupré left the house of his father-in-law, he went first to inquire for his sister, and having spent a few sad moments with her, went to the hotel, whither his baggage had been sent. It was an hour when many of his business acquaintance were on the street, and he perceived by the constraint of some, and the pitying looks of others, how rapidly his secret had become known. Only two or three greeted him with a manner

which showed that though they knew all, they valued him not the less.

Soon after his arrival at the hotel, Mr. Davis, his partner, called over to see him. He was embarrassed, and hardly knew what to say, and was infinitely relieved when Charles told him that although then he was not at liberty to attend to business matters, on the morrow he would see him, and that he wished the partnership between them dissolved, as he intended to leave the country immediately.

Davis assured him their affairs could soon be settled, and added, "I think it is the best thing you can do to leave town, my dear fellow; it might be awkward for you to stay here, you know."

"It might be awkward for some of my summer friends, who stand in awe of 'Mrs. Grundy,'" Charles could not help saying. Mr. Davis blushed, and stammered an apology, and went away with the enviable feeling which a man has after saying just what he didn't intend to say.

Charles remained in his room all day. He had no more fear of being separated from his wife, and her beautiful devotion shed a warm glow of happiness over his heart; but he trembled for the effect of so much excitement and suffering, and he cast an anxious glance into the future, now that all her plans were so distressingly overthrown.

The hours sped slowly, and as the setting sun gave warning that the day would soon be finished, he threw aside some papers and business calculations, which for a little

while had absorbed him, and commenced slowly pacing the room, thinking of Julie, and longing for the moment when he might fly to her. But as the lingering brightness faded out of the west, a shadow seemed to fall suddenly over his spirit, a "horror of great darkness," as if the light of his life was quenched forever.

Startled by this unaccountable depression, fancying himself growing nervous and excited, he sat down again, and strove vainly to fix his thoughts on the lines of figures before him. His mind seemed to have no power to act, and in the gathering twilight the figures appeared to change into a strange cabalistic writing, fraught with the spell of a fearful doom.

As he sat leaning thoughtfully upon his hand, a slight sound, or consciousness that some one was near, made him look up. He gazed intently for a short time, and then grew very pale, and pressed his hand tightly over his eyes, imagining himself the victim of some optical illusion. But when he looked again, Julie yet stood there, mute and still as in a dream, with her tender eyes fixed on him, her silken curls floating over her shoulders, a loose drapery around her, and in her folded arms, pressed caressingly against her bosom, she bore a little babe; while from her whole form a faint light shone out into the gray darkness of the room.

Charles arose slowly from his chair, made one step towards her, and with a shivering thrill of uncertainty and fear, he uttered her name. The pale lips parted with

a celestial smile; raising her hand, she pointed upwards, and the vision disappeared.

He was no longer uncertain; all was plain to him now. Seizing his hat, he rushed into the street, and heedless of the attention he attracted, ran with frantic speed till he reached Mr. Conant's house. The door was not locked then, for one had entered in before him, at whose approach bolts and bars fall asunder.

He went directly to Julie's chamber, and when he saw the group there, he gave one faint, despairing cry, and sprang to the bedside.

She was lying deathly white and still, as he had seen her in the vision; and beside her, with one feeble arm thrown over as if to shield it, lay a tiny babe. His wife! his child! Were both gone? both dead? Ah, no. That loving spirit could not pass away till it had given one last precious token of affection, one assurance, to span with a rainbow bridge of hope the fathomless gulf of death.

For many minutes only a fluttering around her heart had given sign of life; but when she heard her husband's voice, the closed eyelids quivered, and she moved her hand towards him. The nurse and the physician stood near, and at the foot of the bed her father knelt, his face buried in the curtains. Her mother, unable to behold her sufferings, had long since been carried fainting from the chamber.

Charles threw himself down beside his wife, and the

pressure of his arm, his palpitating caress, his fevered breath, pouring forth in words the passion and agony of his soul, seemed to warm even the chill and torpor of death. She opened her eyes, and tried to smile. The physician poured a few stimulating drops between her lips, and she soon revived enough to speak in a low whisper — so low that he held his breath to hear.

"I wanted you so much, dearest; I am going away for a little while. Did you hear me calling you?"

"O Julie! O precious one! live for my sake," he cried; and all his frame wavered and shook with a tremor of pain and rapture, to hear her voice once more, and to hear it thus. Her lip quivered with a grieved expression, and two large tears gathered slowly beneath the long lashes, and rolled over her cheeks. Then she raised her hands, as if begging to be taken up; and Charles, seating himself on the bed, lifted her so that she lay in his arms, with her head on his breast.

When she felt herself there, she nestled down, clinging feebly to him, and smiled again as she looked up in his face, with a contented and happy air even more touching at that moment than tears. It was so like her natural manner, it brought back so vividly the memory of the many, many times when his heart had throbbed with ecstasy beneath its light burden, that it took from him all strength or fortitude, to think how forlorn he should be when that bright head was pillowed in the grave.

But with a mighty effort he hushed his tumultuous

grief. Gently all her life had passed, and gently should she be hushed to her last repose. He knew it was the last, for the face which smiled on him wore that strange look one sees *but once* on the face of any friend. He bent down and kissed her lips softly and reverently, and she whispered in broken accents, nestling close to his heart as she spoke, —

"We are going to heaven, dear — baby and I; God has called us. You remember what I told you *that night. It is true;* I shall be a strong, beautiful angel, to shield you from every thing evil, to comfort and bless you. You will see us again, dear, by and by; I will teach baby to love you, and when you come to us, there will never be any more parting. Say you are willing, dear. I cannot bear to die if you are not willing. Don't cry, darling. God calls me; tell me I may go."

"O Julie, Julie, I am willing; but it breaks my heart," he moaned.

The clear blue eyes grew dim, and a faint shudder passed over her. "It is better so," she murmured. "When I am gone they will pity you. Peace I leave with you — God's peace."

Again there was a shudder, and a long, gasping breath, as higher and higher rose about her the icy waters of the river which winds around the eternal shores.

"Julie, little Julie, speak to me once more," he cried.

Above the surgings of that river, above the songs of waiting angels, she heard his pleading voice, and her spirit

leaned back to answer. Her eyes brightened, and her face assumed an expression so joyous, so radiant, it showed that she had passed forever from out the shadow of earthly woe.

"Darling, I love you," she whispered; and with these words she died.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOURTH.

"God keeps a niche
In heaven to hold our idols! and albeit
He brake them to our faces, and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them, raised, complete,
The dust shook from the beauty, glorified,
New Memnons, singing in the great God-light."

During most of the day previous to her death, Julie had been insensible. After the birth of her babe, one fainting fit followed another, and it was not until they already considered her dying, that she revived and became conscious of her situation. Her first inquiry had been for her husband, and she entreated he might come to her; but when her father was informed of it, he peremptorily refused to send for Charles.

Still the physician hesitated and urged compliance, saying she ought not to be excited or troubled in any way.

"If you tell me you think it will save her life, I suppose I must send for him; not otherwise," replied Mr. Conant. "I do not admit that he has any right to my child."

"I cannot conscientiously say it will save her life," said the doctor; "but surely you will not deny her any thing in her dying state."

Mr. Conant looked down thoughtfully for a short time,

and then answered decidedly, "We will tell her that Charles Dupré will soon be here. It is the truth, for he was to return this evening, and it is now nearly dark."

With this equivocation they satisfied her. She pressed her father's hand to her lips, with a smile of gratitude that pierced his heart like a dagger, leaving a wound which could never heal. But he knew it not then. He only knew he could not bear the gaze of her mild eyes, and kneeling at the foot of the bed he buried his face from sight.

Then she asked for her babe — the helpless being that had only breathed to die; and when it was brought she clasped it to her bosom, and seemed to sink to sleep, her pulses growing fainter, and a cold sweat upon her brow.

"It is death," said the physician; and removing the babe, he laid it on the bed beside her, supposing she would not notice it; but to his surprise a troubled expression shaded the repose of her features, and one hand followed his movements, and was laid caressingly over the little form. At that moment Charles Dupré entered the room.

For a long time after all was over, and the beautiful form he held had grown chill and rigid, he whom she had loved so well kept her pressed close against his breast, her chosen resting-place, and gazed into her face until its peace and quiet joy entered into his soul, there to abide forever.

Forgetting himself, his thoughts followed her to the world where she had gone, and he could bless the mercy

which had appointed for her so brief a trial, so glorious, so safe a shelter in the arms of almighty love. No tears fell on her face, as he laid her down, and crossed the white hands on her bosom. Her last promise was being fulfilled; and even then he realized that the true Julie, the bride of his heart, was still his spirit bride, and though he must leave the form behind him, *she* would be ever by his side.

Yet, O, the precious, precious dust, through which the beauty of the inner life has been manifested! How we cling to it, how we love to look upon it, how we loathe to give it up to the destroyer! Charles returned, again and again, for one more look, one more embrace, until he saw, by the faces of those around, that he might stay no longer. His eye fell on her work basket, which stood upon the little table near; and taking from it that last delicate piece of work, and a tiny pair of scissors, he cut off some of the long bright curls which had been his pride, and wrapping them up together, slowly left the chamber.

When he had gone, Mr. Conant, who had until now remained motionless, lifted up his head, and looked long and earnestly at his daughter's face. Upon his own was a dreadful expression of sorrow and remorse. Staggering to his feet, he bent over her, pressing his lips to her hands and brow.

"O Julie, my child," he murmured, "I loved you — it was not my fault — I did not mean to kill you."

sympathies, and disturb

It was a cold, dark night, and as Charles Dupré walked to his hotel, the keen wind made him shiver, and with a sort of dread he remembered the dark, cheerless room which awaited him, so different from the home he had lost — the lonely room, where there was nothing which her presence and her touch had made sacred. What was his surprise, on arriving there, to find lights and a fire, and to see his sister sitting by the table, her head leaned thoughtfully on her hand!

"My dear Helen!" he exclaimed, "were you not afraid to come out this stormy evening, after your fatigue last night?"

"What is my life worth, except to minister to you," she said. "I heard an hour ago that Julie was very ill — dying — and I could not rest till I had come to you. How is she?"

He had taken her hand, and now his eyes met hers with an expression she could not understand — solemn and yet not sad, as if a light was shining over his face, reflected from some celestial sphere. Presently he said, impressively,—

"He giveth his beloved sleep."

She looked at him anxiously. "Sleep! — do you mean the *last* sleep? O Charles, is she gone? and can you bear it thus?"

Charles seemed to hear her, and yet his eyes were raised and fixed, as [illegible] he gazed earnestly on some far-off object, and his [illegible] had a dreamy tone, like one i[illegible] followed her[illegible]very, as he s[illegible] Why should I [illegible] gone, and he could bless the [illegible] have

laid down my life to shield hers from sorrow? and yet how powerless I was! And now — O the happiness of the life on which she has entered! From the doubt and gloom, from these wearisome days, and these nights that bring no peace, she has gone to perfect joy, to the vigor of immortal powers, to the light of endless day. Blessed be God for the gift of his dear Son, through whom we have hope beyond the grave! Blessed be Christ, the great sacrifice, through whose death we live!"

Helen watched the expression of his features as he said this. Her lips quivered, her eyes filled with tears, and with a quick, nervous motion, like one imploring relief, she held out her hands towards him.

"How can you feel so?" she cried in a distressed voice. "Tell me, Charles, how is it? I cannot comprehend it. You have a tender heart, and you loved her; and now you have lost her — you have lost every thing — bankrupt in hope and happiness, even as I am — and yet you do not murmur or rebel; you suffer, but not as I do. I came here to give you comfort, and I find you calm and almost joyful. O, tell me where to find this peace, this courage, for my soul is dark."

"Dear Helen!" said her brother, seating himself beside her; and now for the first time his voice faltered, and he mingled his tears with hers. His strong, pure heart was very tender, as she had said, and her trouble moved its deepest sympathies, and disturbed its lofty calm.

"Dear Helen," he repeated, "seek it in prayer. It is the gift of God."

"The gift of God?" she replied, hopelessly. "Alas! even he has forsaken me. I cannot submit to his will. I cannot be reconciled to this sorrow. And my suffering is worse than yours — far worse. I was mistaken in thinking you had reached, at last, my level. You have that lovely image ever before your memory, with all its hallowed associations around it, unsullied, as a sanctuary whither you may flee from the coldness and hollowness of the world without. But I — what have I? Nothing but corroding recollections, that eat my heart like poison. It is no pleasure to look back — there is no hope in looking forward."

"My sister, there is hope, there is happiness, if you will accept it. Hear the promise which says, 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' These thorns that wound you so cruelly have deep in their centre a healing balm, and if you can be patient and submissive to bear the pain, its cure will come speedily. There is an almighty Friend, who waits, even now, to give you such blessed rest and peace as will almost make you forget your woes."

She sighed heavily, and answered, "No, that cannot be. Neither you nor I will ever *forget*. To those who have truly loved forgetfulness is impossible. All else fade away, but the name of the beloved is graven on the soul with letters of fire, and must remain there to purify and enlighten,

or to burn and scath it forever. But I am saddening you, instead of comforting. Speak to me now of Julie; or, if you cannot endure that, let us be silent, and I will bear my miserable thoughts alone."

"O Helen, there is your mistake. Hard as is the fate which has overtaken us, we are not called to struggle and to suffer alone. Like a burst of song from the celestial choir comes that evangel, 'I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' Take these words to your own heart, and pray for faith to believe them; and thus you may have part in that legacy which Christ left his disciples." He paused, and added, in a lower tone, "That legacy which Julie left me when she died—'peace, not as the world giveth.'"

"Can it be? Is resignation possible?" she asked, doubtfully, in a calmer tone.

"Why should it not be possible?" said Charles. "What are we, that we should claim exemption from toil and sorrow in this life, when we have all eternity for uninterrupted felicity? Is not God stronger than all these things which seem to be against us? and can he not control them? Is not God wiser than we? Or if he chooses, for his own glory, even to make us monuments of suffering, shall we defeat his purposes by rebellion? Only think how great is the honor of being permitted to glorify God. Before it, how mean appears every other motive that actuates us, every other result of our existence!"

His eyes kindled, and his cheek glowed; and as she watched him, Helen murmured, "It *is* a reality, this religion which you professed years ago, and which has been strengthening so silently and humbly within your soul. But I cannot grasp it now. It is an enigma I cannot solve; and yet I am thankful, Charles, that you are thus supported. Perhaps in time I may learn this lesson. Can you tell me of Julie and the child?"

"She took it to heaven with her," replied Charles, solemnly, "and I shall join them there when it pleases God."

Helen staid at the hotel with her brother until the day of the funeral. The extraordinary elevation of mind which had so steadfastly sustained him on the night of Julie's death continued with but little change. His cares, his fears, his perplexities, had been chiefly for her; and in removing her, some supernatural power seemed to have removed him at the same time from the sphere where they had ranged, into one where he held daily and hourly communion with heaven — a communion in which he learned more fully the meaning of the discipline he had endured, and gathered strength for the toils and duties of his after life. If there were moments when his loneliness became too intense, when memories of the past caused his heart to throb heavily, and his eyes to overflow, they brought with them no bitterness of grief, and no unchris-

tian rebellion; and often he was as surely conscious of Julie's presence as if he had felt her soft hand in his, and heard her whispering of peace.

He did not leave his chamber, and admitted few visitors; though many, who might otherwise have held themselves aloof, were melted by his last misfortune, and eager to express their sympathy. But from the house that had so long been his home there came to him no token of remembrance or pity, and he could not intrude himself within its doors until the hour appointed for the funeral. Then, alone, and dressed in deep mourning, he bent his steps towards it. A great crowd were collected within and about it; but his face was buried in his cloak, and he saw not the compassionate glances which followed him as he passed among them.

In the parlor, at the right side of the hall, he saw the coffin standing upon a table; and approaching, he looked once more on that dear face, which was wont to flush with joy at his coming. Ah, never, never more, through all the weary years, should his heart thrill to meet that glance. Beautiful and beloved as she was, the icy repose of the grave was on her now, and all the passion and power of human love could not move its calm. Never had he felt so utterly alone, so widely separated from her, as in standing beside her there, in clasping the hands which lay so white on her bosom, and gazing on the serene loveliness of the coffined dead.

And yet he could not tear himself away. In this house there seemed now no place for him, except that which her presence sanctified from the entrance of worldly and evil thoughts. The family were assembled in a room adjoining; but when one of the neighbors invited him to enter there, he quietly refused, and remained leaning on the coffin until the services were over. Then with his own hand he closed the lid, and bending over it in silent prayer, breathed low and deep a last farewell, and followed it from the house.

No carriage had been provided for him, but Mr. Avenel offered his. He entered and took his place at the head of the long procession; and when the rural cemetery was reached, he stood as chief mourner by the grave.

Mr. Conant had not intended this should be. In his bitter anger, in his sullen stubbornness, he would have ignored Charles's right to be numbered with his family; but the quiet dignity wherewith the proceeding had been conducted compelled him to silence.

The coffin was lowered into the grave, and the procession moved away; but Charles lingered long beside it. The shadows of evening lowered around him; the fitful breezes whirled the dead leaves in rustling wreaths, that fell over his feet, and into the open chasm, as if hastening to hide the treasure he had laid there. Through the naked branches of the trees he looked up and saw the stars come out one by one, keen glittering in the frosty air. How far off they seemed! how unapproachable in

their glory! how their unsympathizing brightness mocked the desolate, cheerless spot to which his life was bound! Tears blinded his eyes as he gazed, and he prayed that he too might die.

At that moment a sharp, rattling sound struck his ear. It was the first earth falling on the coffin; for the sexton had grown weary, and commenced filling up the grave.

With an irrepressible moan of anguish, he turned away; and as he did so, Ned Conant stood before him.

"You are here still; I hoped I should find you; I hurried back, for I noticed you staid behind," he said, in an excited tone, and so rapidly that Charles hardly knew whether the greeting was friendly or otherwise. But while he hesitated and looked at him inquiringly, the impulsive boy threw himself upon his arm, and burst into tears.

"Let us come away from here, Ned—from these dreadful sounds," said Charles, struggling for composure.

They walked on a short distance, and presently Ned recovered himself, and began talking in a broken, embarrassed manner.

"I ran away; I was determined I *would* see you; we are all of us most dead about it. Father has acted like a brute," he added, vehemently.

"Hush," exclaimed Charles; "I don't want to think about that now."

"But I must tell you, Charles, or you would think I joined in with the rest of 'em. I don't see what possesses

'em all. If you had been a real black fellow, there might be some sense in making a fuss, for black ain't a very handsome color on the face," he continued, bluntly, his unconquerable love of fun gleaming out even here. "But being as you are, I don't see how you are any worse for having ancestors that lived in Africa some hundred years back. I say, Charles, it's a mean piece of business to treat you so. And little Julie! O Charles, the house seems like a tomb without her;" and again the boy burst into tears.

Charles hardly knew how to reply to him; but without any reference to himself, he tried to calm and soothe. When he had in some measure succeeded, Ned said, more quietly, "I feel better, now I have seen you. I always liked you, and felt as if somehow *she* would be glad to know that I told you so now. I don't know how far off heaven is, but she must be changed a good deal if they are able to keep her from taking an interest in knowing what we are about down here; and it'll take as much as *one* angel to comfort her, if she finds you are unhappy."

"My dear boy, it is a great comfort to me to know your feelings are unchanged. You are right, too, in supposing Julie would be glad of it. Do you know what some of her last words were?" he added, tremulously.

"No. They said she whispered so low that nobody could hear."

"I heard her. She said, 'They will be kind to you when I am gone.'"

He broke down utterly in repeating these words, and for some time could not speak again.

"Poor little Julie, what a darling she was!" said Ned, mournfully. "I must tell father of that," he added, after a pause; "for, Charles, I'm afraid he won't be kind to you. He seems to hate you — as if you could have helped it! And he has forbidden us to speak to you any more."

"And yet you are here," rejoined Charles.

"Yes, I was bound to have a talk with you, at any rate; and I'll come and see you as often as I can, without letting him know. I believe mother would be glad to see you, if father wasn't so shocking angry."

"No, Ned, you must not come to see me, if your father has forbidden it," replied Charles. "Your duty to him is superior to any you owe to me; and now I know you feel kindly, I shall not think your heart is changed towards me because your conduct must be."

"I don't think I am obliged to obey such an unreasonable command," said Ned, resolutely.

"I do," answered Charles; "and since I can never forget how kind your father once was to me, I should be very sorry to have him think I encouraged you in any act of disobedience, even if it were not wrong."

"Well," answered Ned, thoughtfully, after a long silence, during which they had reached the gate of the cemetery, "I think you are a little bit too awful good; but if you say I *must* mind, I suppose I must. But I am

not obliged to *think* as he does, and I won't. There's no rhyme or reason in the way he goes on."

"I am going away soon, and time and absence may soften his feelings towards me," replied Charles. "But if not, do not let me occasion any trouble between you. I would rather perish than be the cause of strife or separation in your once happy family. You can adhere to principle without mentioning personalities."

"What shall I do, then?" asked the boy; "I want to be of use to you, in some way."

"You can remember these scenes, though you never speak of them; and when you are a man, act in reference to these subjects as you think Julie would approve, in the pure and peaceful home from whence she bends to watch over us."

"That I will," said Ned, earnestly. "I feel ever so much better for having this talk with you; and if I don't have another very soon, you'll know the reason. Good by, now, for I must get home before it is dark."

His good by was returned by a prolonged clasp of the hand, and with repeated assurances of friendship they parted; and Charles returned to the hotel, sincerely thankful for the kindly impulse which had prompted this conversation.

Weeks and months passed away. Before the cold of winter ribbed the river with ice, and buried hill and

valley beneath drifts of snow, Charles Dupré settled the affairs of his copartnership, and went to study theology with an old clergyman, in the town where his boyhood had been spent. Helen wished to accompany him; but she could be of no service in this preparation for a life of labor, and Mrs. Avenel insisted that she should remain with her. For Helen was in that state of mind when all her friends knew it was not best she should be much alone, and at liberty to brood over her own wretchedness. She made no complaints, and she shrank haughtily, almost defiantly, from expressions of pity or sympathy; but the severe melancholy of her pallid face told how deep and keen was the suffering she endured in such proud silence.

With Mrs. Avenel, whose kindness had never for a moment failed, she could not be otherwise than gentle; but she was so quick to read the meaning of an involuntary word or look, so prompt to resent a cold civility or an intended slight, — and there were some persons cruel enough to award both to her changed social position, — that her soured and misanthropic feelings became daily more fixed, and life more than ever worthless and purposeless. Even her brother's affection and Colonel Bell's unwearying solicitude failed to elicit any strong emotion, or awaken energy or hope. All the strength of her nature was absorbed in doing battle with the memories which would not be driven or charmed away.

She did not know that Hubert had been the victim of

a long and dangerous illness; for she had never mentioned his name, and recoiled so sensitively from any allusion to him, that from delicacy, as well as from a desire to spare her anxiety, those who knew of it had refrained from informing her. She thought he had quietly accepted her command to leave her; and though it was sincere, though she would have forbidden him to follow her, she was, by a natural contradiction of feeling, disappointed that he could, so entirely and with such apparent willingness, obey; that he could leave her, ill and perhaps friendless, without one token of recollection, if not of love. She scorned herself that she could not scorn him; she fought with desperate passion against the yearning of her soul. No iconoclast ever raised his hand against an idol with more vengeful purpose than she uplifted hers to smite from her heart's altar the image she had worshipped; but the old idolatry was too strong, and the blow ever changed to a caress, and the struggle ended in weakness and prostration. At times her moods were wildly gay and brilliant, and full of feverish mirth and energy, that made her talk and laugh; and generally, when with the family, she made an effort to be cheerful, that she might not cast a gloom over the domestic circle; but they all noticed that she never sang, and always left them when music was introduced, as if it was linked with associations too painful to be borne; and when alone with Mrs. Avenel, where she knew no disguise was necessary, her uniform dejection and quiet told of the bitterness within.

Her brother often came to see her; for after the scene of frantic excitement which he alone had witnessed in her chamber at the Pines, he was apprehensive that the conflict of emotion might end in insanity; and he earnestly desired to impart some of the precious consolations which made it possible for him to be content, and even happy, notwithstanding his altered circumstances and his lonely lot. But the grace of submission would naturally have been more difficult for Helen than for Charles; and having lived so long in utter thoughtlessness of religious truths, it was now doubly hard for her to feel their force amid the exasperation and impatience that daily convulsed her soul.

It was during one of his visits, when he had left her after a protracted conversation, that she sat a long time silent, with her eyes fixed on the fire, and her countenance expressing deep thought and perplexity. Mrs. Avenel did not disturb her revery, and the slight rustling of her sewing and the crackling of the blazing embers alone broke the silence. Out of doors, the snow was sinking softly, in large flakes, through a still hazy atmosphere, which made the clouds seem so very low that the children said the sky was falling.

"I cannot comprehend it," said Helen, at length, addressing her friend. "Do you not think Charles's state of feeling very remarkable?"

"I do, and yet it is but that simple and childlike mind wherein the Scriptures bid us 'cast all our care upon

Him who careth for us.' When one does this truly, sincerely, the burden becomes light, because of the Almighty hand which aids us to bear it."

"But the ability to do this constantly, without reservation or misgiving, cannot be gained in a moment. What would I not give if I could now, for one hour only, feel as Charles does, and be rid of the weary heart-aching that, night or day, sleeping or waking, never leaves me! How he loved his wife! and yet he can speak calmly of her death. How bright his prospects were! how suddenly they were blighted! and yet he refers to them without repining, and sometimes becomes quite animated in looking forward to a life of toil and self-denial. When he first began to talk thus, I thought it was the effect of excitement, and would not last; but now, three months have passed, and he seems even stronger-hearted than at first. Can it be delusion of fancy which serves him instead of solid happiness? or does he really have the peace of mind he seems to enjoy? Overwhelmed with the same misfortune, I find myself in a case so different, that sometimes I cannot believe in the reality of his emotions."

"I think you need not doubt. Did not Christ promise that those who were entirely devoted to him, giving up all worldly good, should receive 'a thousand fold *in this life*,' as well as life eternal in the world to come? Now, this 'thousand fold' must of course refer to spiritual blessings, so great as to entirely fill the soul, and be a

source of happiness, like tangible objects. If this is promised, it can surely be granted; and your brother is one proof among many others, that these words are true."

"Charles was religious from his boyhood," replied Helen, thoughtfully; "but I never realized how very good he was until now."

"We cannot always estimate the growth of divine grace in the soul. Sometimes those who seem to have the most of it faint and fail when the hour of trial comes; and there are others who live on humbly and quietly from day to day, hardly conscious themselves how closely they guard their spiritual being, until suddenly the beautiful plant, which has grown unnoticed among meaner flowers, is crowned with such splendid and perfect fruit as to attract the gaze of all."

"I am afraid there has been nothing but weeds growing in my heart's garden, and now the fruit is poisonous," replied Helen, smiling sadly. "O Mrs. Avenel, so rich as you are in husband, children, social position, — every thing that makes happiness, — how can you appreciate the terrible desolation of my condition? You have had trials — you have made sacrifices; but still there was one on whom all your faith and hope was cast, who could say, 'I am thine; I will go with thee; thou shalt be to me instead of home and friends.' But how different to be forsaken, to be cast out, like a flower torn from the blessed wreath of household charities, to lie broken and fading on the ground, and be trodden under foot! I

know it is vain for me to struggle or rebel, but I cannot help it. The soul will writhe and quiver, as it feels the pressure of its chains. If I could see clearly — if I knew perfectly — it might be easy to live. But to grope thus amid thick shadows, to weary myself with vain toils, to pant thus for the fountain whose cool waters may never lave my brow or lip — O, why do I live? Many far stronger and happier are cut down, and the earth covers them. Would I, too, could die!"

Her voice failed in broken sobs, and she buried her face in her hands. Mrs. Avenel left her seat, and kneeling beside her, laid one arm over the bowed neck, and with her cheek pressed to hers, said sadly, —

"Ah! well is it for us, weak creatures of earth, that there is, beyond the skies, an infinite love, alone sufficient to fill the infinite capacities of our nature. Dear Helen, can you not believe in it, and accept it?"

"How can I? How shall I?" said Helen, looking up.

"Here is my favorite author; let him teach us," said Mrs. Avenel, smiling gently. "He was a man of large spiritual experience, and I can almost always find something here that expresses my thoughts better than I can do;" and taking up a small book, which lay on her work table, she read a few passages aloud: —

"'My son, forsake thyself, and thou shalt find me.

"'For greater grace shall be added to thee, the moment thou dost fully resign thyself, *if thou dost not turn back to take thyself again.*

"'Give all for all — seek nothing, require back nothing; abide purely and with a firm confidence in me, and thou shalt possess me; thou shalt be free in heart, and darkness shall not tread thee down.

"'Let this be thy whole endeavor; let this be thy prayer, this thy desire — that being stripped of all selfishness, thou mayst with entire simplicity follow Jesus only, and dying to thyself, mayst live eternally to me.

"'Then shall all vain imaginations, evil perturbations, and superfluous cares fly away.

"'Then, also, immoderate fear shall leave thee, and inordinate love shall die.'"

Helen listened earnestly, and when her friend had finished, took the volume and read them again silently; but she made no reply, and not wishing to urge the subject too far, Mrs. Avenel left her to the revery which followed, and soon after stole quietly from the room.

There was one member of the family whose whole heart glowed with a desire to be of some service to the unfortunate girl. This was Henry, who had watched her varying moods with a painful sympathy and comprehension beyond his years. Now, seated quietly with his book in the recessed window, unheeded or forgotten, he had heard the conversation we have related, and, trembling all over with excited feeling, he could not refrain from gliding to Helen's side, after Mrs. Avenel had left

her; and seating himself on the floor at her feet, he said, in a choked voice, —

"I know just how you feel. O Miss Helen, I used to feel so too. I used to think I would give all the world if I only could be different from what I am. I used to feel as if I should die when I saw how negroes were treated by most folks, and thought that never, never, in all my life, could I help being black. When I looked at other boys, and saw how much better off they were, I used to be real angry with God, and feel as if I hated every body else."

Helen had been at first startled by his sudden appearance, and then she became interested and aroused by his earnest manner. Child as he was, he had penetrated her impotent rebellion, her despairing grief, and pressing the hand he had laid timidly on her knee, she said, —

"You don't appear to feel like this. One would think you were happy."

"So I am, now — most of the time: sometimes I get wrong, somehow, and then things trouble me again. It was Mrs. Avenel helped me at first. O Miss Helen, if you would only submit to God! That makes every thing easy."

"I do, child," said Helen, proudly, and half impatiently, "I do submit. What else can I do? I must submit — I can't do any thing else."

"O, that isn't submitting — not while you feel so,"

replied Henry. "That is only fighting and getting beaten."

A sudden light flashed through Helen's soul; all that had been said had failed to unveil herself to her mental vision, as did these few childlike words. Her cheek crimsoned with a quick rush of emotion, and dropping his hand, she gazed on him in surprise. He feared she was offended; but presently she said, in a quiet tone, —

"What is it, then, to be submissive?"

"I don't know as I can tell exactly," he said, "but it seems to me it is to be *real glad* we can't have our own way, and that God governs us all the time, and makes every thing happen to us just as he thinks best."

"How long have you known this?" asked Helen.

"I've *known* it a good while, for Mrs. Avenel told me; but I didn't really *feel* so until about a year ago." And then he went on to tell her of his unhappiness and trials; and how, shut up in his heart, they had burned like fire; until at length, unable to endure them, he had revealed them to his protector, Mrs. Avenel. He told of her advice, of the new and holier life that opened to him as she spoke of the honor of humility, of the happiness of self-sacrifice, of the nobleness of living for holiness instead of pleasure. Helen listened, astonished at the development of heart and mind his words evinced; and as she heard this boyish experience of struggles so nearly akin to her own, she realized that the faith which sustains and

cheers was no fiction of the imagination, no unattainable abstraction, but something which a child can grasp; and for the first time she caught a glimpse of the distinction between the sorrow that elevates and purifies, and "the sorrow of the world, which worketh death."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIFTH.

> " Live and love,
> Doing both nobly because lowlily.
> Live and work strongly, because patiently
> * * * And thence with constant prayers
> Fasten your souls so high, that evermore
> The smile of your heroic cheer may float
> Above all floods of earthly agonies —
> Purification being the joy of pain."

Persons sometimes undergo a change of thought and feeling to which human language can do little justice. In the simple and forcible words of Scripture it is called " the new birth ; " and perhaps this figure, better than any other, expresses the sudden dawning of light upon the hitherto darkened mind ; and the thrill of life which runs through the nerves with the first breathing in of the divine influences, which are henceforth to be the indispensable support of spiritual existence. This change Helen had experienced — this change, so mighty, so mysterious, that none can understand, and few can even fully believe in it, except those who have individually realized its power. She scarcely knew how to comprehend the profound calm which soothed and upheld her spirit, as a mother lulls the babe on her bosom, hushing it to a deeper rest because of its former crying.

Gone was now the stormy and turbulent grief which had dashed against her soul, wave after wave, benumbing and hardening, as the freezing waters of the arctic zone dash on their shores of ice; gone the sullen despair which had wrapped her about as a pall. Filled with wonder and gratitude, she had submitted to the rite whereby we are commanded to signify the death to sin and the resurrection to holiness, and in the liquid grave, where she had been laid, all the past years seemed buried, and she raised thence to a new and hallowed life.

Her circumstances and prospects were the same as before; nothing had changed since the hour when self-destruction seemed the only good. What, then, was it which gave her strength and courage to look calmly at the future, to think of the past with a resignation which made it easy to remember suffering, and to bless the Providence which had stricken from her hands all the precious things she held so closely, that they might be filled with treasures infinitely satisfying and eternal?

Could this be fancy — the delusion of an excited brain? Ah, no! A man blind from his birth may deny the existence of light; but what argument, however lucid, however plausible to him who utters it, can be convincing to one who has beheld the glory of the sunshine? and there are emotions which strike the soul with convictions as definite and immovable as any evidence addressed to the senses. Unhappy he on whom this spiritual life has never dawned.

It was the close of a warm Sabbath in early spring, and a Sabbath stillness seemed to brood in the clear light which filled the valley, and flushed the silver cloudlets in the west with rainbow hues, as the sun sank below the horizon. From the blue river course the hills stretched away, lifting themselves in tree-crowned undulations. Banks of snow lay beside the fences, and in shady nooks and hollows, and along the furrows of the ploughed fields; but through the groves a faint, uncertain tinge of green was brightening, in sunny spots the grass was springing, and the water was draining slowly from the swollen brooks and the meadow lands.

The Avenel family were assembled in their cozy parlor, where every thing breathed an air of home comfort. The children, seated behind the curtains in the bay windows, were bending their eager little heads together, and whispering low over a book of colored engravings, while their elders were listening silently to the music which floated through the room, as the organ gave out its deep, rich tones beneath the touch of Helen's fingers. She had been playing some of Beethoven's inspired airs; but as the daylight faded, and the firelight began to cast its flickering shadows, the notes glided dreamily into a simpler strain; and in a voice slightly tremulous with emotion, she sang words humble and yet triumphant, which told whence came the serene joy that rested on her face, and gleamed softly from her eyes, and mantled with a faint

glow the cheek that had been so white with the stain of her rebellious tears.

> "Earth may trouble and distress me —
> 'Twill but drive me to thy breast;
> Life with trials hard may press me —
> Heaven will give me sweeter rest.
> O, 'tis not in grief to harm me,
> While thy love is left to me;
> O, 'twere not in joy to charm me,
> Were that joy apart from thee."

A hand was laid gently over her lips, and Charles said, —

"We must deny ourselves the pleasure of hearing you, Helen, for you know the doctor has forbidden you to sing."

She smiled, and turning away from the instrument, placed herself beside him on the sofa, where Colonel Bell was also seated; who, accompanied by the elder Mrs. Avenel, had arrived in town a few days previous.

"Your voice is almost as strong, and fully as sweet as ever; and if it were not for that hacking cough, which sounds its warning now and then, I could hardly believe that you are in any danger, you look so much better than when I saw you last," said Colonel Bell.

"She looks happier, and that makes a very great difference," said Charles, gazing fondly on his sister.

"I am happier — I was very, very wretched then," she replied, tranquilly.

"And I am so selfish, that I am glad to have you a little ill," said Colonel Bell, since otherwise I should have been hardly able to induce you to take this journey,

in which I hope to enjoy so much. Now we will cross the Atlantic, and if the sea air does not restore you, as I hope it will, a summer in Switzerland and Germany will assist your cure, and an Italian climate complete it."

"It will be very pleasant," said Helen, "and if I am to live I shall be glad to be well and strong again, and be able to enter upon my life work."

"What do you mean," replied her father, anxiously. "You surely do not intend to accompany your brother to Liberia."

"I am not going to Liberia," said Charles.

"I thought you told me yesterday that you should devote your life to a missionary work."

"So I shall — but it is to my own countrymen, in my native land. There is much to be done here, before it can be of great use to colonize Liberia."

"Ah," said the colonel, a little puzzled, "I did not understand your views."

"They are these. It seems to me that the attention of those who desire to overthrow the monstrous system of oppression and injustice which disgraces this country should be directed, in a great degree, to the work of educating and elevating the negro race residing in the Northern States. The force of prejudice and circumstance has hitherto kept the mass on a level which was only elevated above that of the well-kept servant of the south, because it was on the vantage ground of freedom — an immense difference in *reality*, as is proved by the heroic

efforts made to attain and hold it, but with such apparent similarity that slaveholders are continually pointing to our colored population as proof of the incapacity of the race for self-support and self-guidance. Helen has told me of this, and I have seen something of it myself; but I never realized until lately how strongly and bitterly the minds of northern men were tinctured with the idea of the white man's supremacy, and how coldly and disdainfully they look on when one of the oppressed people is struggling to rise."

He spoke with much feeling, and the color flushed Helen's face as she listened; for both remembered many disagreeable evidences of the prejudice against color which they had already experienced, and deep in the heart of each lay a thought too painful to be lightly uttered, yet well understood by their companions.

"If this is the case," said Colonel Bell, after a pause, during which no one had spoken, "why do you try to fight against it? Why not agree to my proposition, claim your right to be called one of the superior race, and go with your sister and me to those countries where it will not be contradicted or disputed. If there is this hatred between the races — and I believe there is — it will be much better for philanthropic people to send the negroes back to Africa for if they live together one must be depressed."

"I thought so, too, at one time," said Mr. Avenel. "I was a great friend of the 'Colonization Society,' and

looked with much hope on the republic of Liberia. But I am less sanguine now, and it seems a less hopeful enterprise to send ignorant, half-civilized beings among a horde of savages, who could readily teach them barbarism, but would be slow to learn or appreciate the restraints of civilization. If a great work is done here, in America, *first*, that colony republic may be the regeneration of Africa; but if crude and imperfect materials only are furnished from these shores, how can we expect to find there the tools necessary to fashion them into a glorious and perfect temple of Christianity and freedom?"

"It may be as you say," replied Colonel Bell; "I have never thought much about it. Indeed, until recently, I have never considered it worth much thought."

"And then it is utterly impossible for the colored population of this country to be expatriated in any considerable numbers," continued Mr. Avenel, "and it is idle to talk of it. For better or for worse, they are here, and must always remain our countrymen; and I do not consider it any evil. There are some fine traits in the African character, which more favorable circumstances will develop to the admiration of the world, and in agreeable contrast to the antagonistic vices of the Anglo-Saxons. There need be no slavery, either of law or of public opinion, in consequence of this occupation of the country. When both races become more enlightened, more Christianized, they can live together as peaceably, and with as

much mutual profit, as, in other countries, races as distinct and less intermixed have lived and flourished."

"But will that time ever come?" said Helen, a little despondingly. "I am willing to work for it; but in thinking of the past and present, I confess my faith is hardly strong enough to overcome my fears."

"Yes," replied her brother, — and his clear eyes lighted with that earnest enthusiasm of hope which seemed like prophecy, — "yes, that day will come; and though you and I will not live to see it, we can rejoice to know that this tearful seed time shall then produce such glorious and abundant harvest. We are working for it, and our reward is in the grand future of eternity; for the feeblest effort is never lost."

Colonel Bell looked at him with surprise and some perplexity. These philanthropic aims and struggles were so different from the tenor of his own life, that he could hardly understand them, or the motives from whence they sprang.

"This, then, is your work," he said, thoughtfully. "You mean to try to elevate this miserable people, whose condition has certainly been the most soothing consideration for the awakened conscience of a slaveholder. I think you are right in supposing that if it could be done — if the negroes could become refined, educated, thrifty — it would be the most fearful blow ever struck at that southern institution, which I have cursed and hated as bitterly as you do, though not as unselfishly. But,

Charles, I tell you it will be labor thrown away — this project of yours. Never was a down-trodden race elevated except through their own efforts; where they rely upon others, they only change masters. Their help must come from themselves."

"You are right," said Charles; "the struggle, the toil, the victory must be theirs, but they can be encouraged and incited to effort by the labor of others. Nobody can do their work for them, and until they see its importance, and enter upon it resolutely, patiently, and with a perseverance which no obstacles can overcome, the day of their redemption will be delayed; but others can furnish them with tools for their work, with arms for their warfare." He paused, and then added, earnestly and with dignity, "Linked as I am with both races, yet cut off from all that once bound me to regard the prejudices of the one, I give myself to the claims of the other. My labor will be humble, but it will not be in vain. Some have already entered this field, and more will follow; and Americans have such a propensity to admire people who struggle and *conquer*, that slowly but surely public opinion will change, and they, — we, — who have been the jest and scorn of our countrymen, will come to be respected for the worth and power which we shall develop."

"And when that day comes the death-knell of slavery has sounded," said Mrs. Avenel, her dark eyes kindling. "It is for this work I wish Henry to be educated."

Colonel Bell had not replied to Charles, for he could not fully sympathize with his enthusiasm, and he was not pleased that his son persisted in reminding himself and them of his connection with the people for whom he was to labor; therefore, when Helen said, playfully, in reply to Mrs. Avenel's remark, "What a missionary trio we shall be! What an amount of good we shall accomplish!" he rejoined, almost sharply, —

"Why do you say *we*? What do you expect to have to do with it?"

"O, I shall keep school, and try to make myself useful in various ways," she answered, smiling, "besides the very important primary use of being mistress of a home for my brother, and a confidant of his cares."

"Please yourself with such visions if you will," said Colonel Bell, watching with a jealous pang the affection which beamed from her beautiful eyes, as they looked up to Charles; "but I hope to have you both in a far pleasanter home than the one you have pictured, before many months have passed."

"You must not tempt me too strongly to a life of indolence, for employment is the best thing for both of us," Helen replied. "Active benevolence is the only sure preventive against vain regrets. We shall become unhappy if we are idle."

"You have promised to be contented with my plans for you until your health is restored; and by that time I hope to have made myself as necessary to you as you

now are to me," replied Colonel Bell, in a low voice, pressing her hand; "when your play time is over will be time enough to talk about work;" and unwilling to encounter further opposition, he was glad that the summons to the tea table just then put an end to the conversation.

During the time which intervened between this evening and the time fixed for their departure, Colonel Bell tried every available argument to induce Charles to accompany Helen and himself abroad; but Charles was anxious to enter upon the labor to which he was self-devoted, and firmly declined the tempting offer. Helen would not have consented to leave him; but her health was much worn with the long agony she had endured, and the physicians ordered change of scene and climate as indispensable to her recovery. Her father's kindness and generosity, so delicately proffered, could not fail to excite her gratitude, and gradually won for him some return to the affection he lavished upon her; but she clung to her brother with an ardor which made separation doubly painful to them both. To be with him, to cheer and comfort his hours of loneliness, to share his labors, seemed now the only pleasant lot on earth; and she could hardly conceal her lack of interest in the glowing schemes of amusement which Colonel Bell delighted to bring before her mind.

But he was patient. He was determined to win her heart, and in his correspondence with her through the winter, and now in his daily intercourse, he watched her

assiduously, and strove to assimilate his tastes to hers, to become familiar with the subjects which most interested her, and to gain command over the subtle springs of emotion and thought. To the Avenels, who had known him only as a quiet, stern, and latterly as an anxious and care-worn man, it was strange to see how, in Helen's presence, he seemed rejuvenated — full of the long-forgotten enthusiasm of his youth, and eager to please her lightest wish. By degrees they were all coming into a chastened and healthy state of feeling. They had courage now to look calmly at their bitter disappointment, their cruel adversity; to realize all it involved, and yet to see some happiness left in life, and to think of their fellow-men without impatience or misanthropy. With the children this was the result of religious faith, and the germ of that heavenly peace over the growth of which the mutations of time can have no power. With the father it was the consequence of new hopes and plans, wherein he expected a more entire satisfaction than in those which had been overthrown — expectations that years might prove as unstable and uncertain as their predecessors.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIXTH.

"Know you what it is when anguish, with apocalyptic *never*,
To a Pythian height dilates you, and despair sublimes to power?
* * * * * * *
It plucks up the social fictions, — bloody-rooted though leaf-verdant, —
Treads them down with words of shaming — all the purple and the gold,
And the 'landed stakes' and 'lordships,' — all that spirits pure and ardent
Are cast out of love and reverence, because chancing not to hold."

HUBERT WARNER arose, weakened in constitution and with nerves all unstrung, from the long and dangerous fever, which, although perhaps contracted before he left Cuba, was intensely aggravated by the distress and excitement of those first days after his return. At the time Helen left the neighborhood he was raving wildly in delirium, and when reason returned, and they were obliged to answer his repeated demands for her presence by telling him of her departure, the news came near causing a relapse that would have been fatal.

But as he slowly recovered, a moody irritability took the place of the impatient longing he had felt for her; he ceased to speak of her, and silenced the children who had been delighted because in his chamber they were allowed the privilege, nowhere else enjoyed, of talking endlessly of their dear and never-to-be-forgotten Miss Helen. Old feelings, old thoughts, were reasserting

their dominion. He was trying to make himself believe that he could perhaps live without her; that it was a folly unworthy of his manhood to throw away every thing for love; that she had shown a wilful pride, inconsistent with any deep affection for him, and an unpardonable coldness of heart, in leaving him at a time when his life trembled in the balance between death and recovery. Mrs. Avenel could have removed this last conviction, which angered and pained him intolerably, because it bore some semblance of truth; but he was too feeble to be master of his own actions, and by a very skilful series of manœuvres he was prevented from having any private conversation with one who alone could have told him Helen was ignorant of his situation, then and afterwards. Thus he was left to brood over this thought — to contrast her continued silence with the warm anxiety he had manifested concerning her illness — and to persuade himself that for a being so cold, so implacable, so haughtily independent, it was not worth his while to sacrifice the earnest wishes and cherished prejudices of the family who were so tenderly devoted to him.

Occasionally it occurred to him that he was acting over again the old fable of the wolf and the lamb, and that his anger was unreasonable; and there were moments when, recalling her sensitiveness and delicacy of feeling, he forgot to wonder at her apparent want of interest in his danger, and blamed himself more than her. Once he exerted himself, until he was exhausted, in writing a letter

to her, and for days after waited in feverish impatience for a reply, unconscious that those who were determined to make his union with Helen impossible had destroyed his epistle without a single misgiving. It was midwinter before he recovered sufficiently to leave home — and at that season he was assured a journey northward would certainly be fatal to him — an assurance in which his own reason joined. Imbittered and weary of life, he acceded to the advice of a physician, and the entreaties of his family, and embarked for a voyage to the Mediterranean.

From Genoa he wandered through Italy, noting, without enthusiasm, its thousand appeals to an all-absorbing interest; though the air of melancholy and desolation which hangs over this "Niobe of Nations" accorded pleasantly with the vague, half-acknowledged consciousness of loss and defeat which continually accompanied him.

If Helen had died loving and knowing herself beloved, he could have borne it; perhaps in time he might have loved again. But to lose her thus, to know she was still living, and that a few days or weeks might bring him to her side, and yet never more to see her, never to hear her voice, or the sound of her light footsteps, but to be haunted ever by the memory of their last interview, to know that she deemed him recreant, false, and failing in the hour of trial, incapable of the generous self-devotion she had expected, and which she could have met with a noble renunciation, — this was what goaded him inces-

santly, and moved him with irresistible heart yearnings, over which distance and the lapse of time had no power. Yet the journey which abated his mental disease so little quite removed the physical malady; for it is a fact that the sensitive muscle called the heart can, under certain circumstances, endure a great deal of suffering, without interfering very much with the action of the digestive organs, or the secretions of the adipose tissue. As spring advanced he turned his steps towards Paris, intending to return thence, through England, homeward.

The day after his arrival in this city of the world, he was sauntering through the gardens of the Tuileries, when his attention was attracted by a group sitting somewhat apart from any other, in a shady and quiet nook.

It was a lady of middle age, whose fair and placid face, deeply touched with sadness, hardly needed the green ribbon which bound her eyes to tell she was blind; for beneath the forced repose of her manner were seen that quick starting at any sound, and that expression of the intense vigilance of every other sense, which distinguish persons bereft of sight. At her feet sat a beautiful young girl, with one hand clasped in her mother's, while the other held a book, over which her face was bent with an air of deep interest, as she read aloud.

There was something so attractive in this tableau, contrasting as it did with the vivacity of the butterfly groups in the background, that Hubert lingered a moment to watch them. The girl was reading that exquisite story

of *Picciola*, and as he passed, her clear voice reached his ear, with these words, —

"*Science, esprit, beauté, jeunesse, fortune, tout ici bas, est impuissant à donner le bonheur.*"

"*Teresa ajouta, 'Sans l'amour!'*"

"It is true," he murmured, audibly, as he walked on. "Have I not proved its truth? Six weary months I have struggled vainly to find contentment in whatever the world had of pleasure, without Helen. I have denied my better nature, of which she was the good angel, and tried to believe I could at last forget her. It is in vain; and now a child's lips echo the whisper of my own heart, and warn me that without her there is no hope of happiness. I will go to her, and if she can forgive — the world is wide enough, and we can find a home."

Wrapped in such musings, he wandered on, and found himself at length before the Louvre. He entered, and for a while yielded to the pleasure of recognizing the pictures which had excited his admiration during a visit some years previous. An hour or two had elapsed, and as he was standing before one of Rubens's masterpieces, he was aroused from a revery by a conversation between two gentlemen beside him.

"Is it not perfect, as I told you?" said one enthusiastically, continuing a remark of which Hubert had lost the first sentence. "Notice the contour of her head and shoulders, and the chiselling of her features. I wish her hat was removed, that you might see her hair — it is

magnificent. She is too thin, as all American women are, but otherwise she is faultless."

"You are right," said his companion; "and yet the charm of that beauty is not in feature or form, so much as in expression. I should like to know that woman; she must be one of the noblest of womankind, one of great purity and strength of character, capable of enjoying and suffering much. And if I mistake not, she has suffered. There is more than ill health in the tender pensiveness of that face."

Hubert's eyes followed the direction of theirs; his heart gave one mighty throb, and then stood still, and for a moment all grew indistinct about him. But in that throb it shook off forever all the selfishness and worldly pride which had trammelled and palsied its workings, and rose up free and pure, a true and noble heart, stronger and better for the conflict it had endured.

Helen Dupré was at a short distance from him, seated before Murillo's picture of The Assumption. Entranced in thought, her attitude reminded him of the morning he had found her thus absorbed, in the green shadow of the forest; but the face which then was bent downward was now raised a little, as her eyes were fixed on the painting, and in the light which fell from above, over cheek and brow, he saw that though the freshness and bloom of that morning had departed, she had gained in its stead an ethereal loveliness, delicate and holy, and the expression which her features wore made her seem the living coun-

terpart of the picture upon which she gazed. To Helen it spoke volumes, that figure of the Virgin, rising amid floating clouds of glory, angel faces around her, angel hands sustaining and beckoning her upward. She who had been the Mater Dolorosa, bowed with anguish, — she to whom it had been said in the first blessedness of maternal love, " A sword shall pierce thine heart," — where were the traces of her sorrow and her tears? Her struggles and pangs were over now; she understood the purposes of God in that keen heart wound, and if some lines of chastened grief still lingered round her mouth, the glorious upturned eyes overspread them with the light of perfect knowledge and unending joy.

Deep into Helen's heart sank this foreshadowing of spiritual triumph, of the blessedness of those who enter heaven " out of great tribulation;" and she was unaware how long she had been left alone, when Colonel Bell returned to her side, accompanied by a gentleman whom Hubert instantly remembered, having formed a very pleasant acquaintance with him during the few weeks he had spent in Rome. He was also known to the gentleman who still remained near Hubert, and who now said to his companion, —

" Ha! there is Clarendon! I thought he could not be far away. Colonel Bell evidently favors his suit."

" And he is enamoured as evidently," replied the other. " Head over heels — heels over head. He's done for

this world, if he don't succeed there," said his friend, laughing.

"He hasn't made a very great impression yet, however. I see it in her expression. What a face she has! Can you introduce me?"

"I should hardly like to take the liberty, upon the very slight acquaintance I have as yet established with their party. I have only admired at a distance; but I mean to know her better, and then ——"

"Since I am a married man, you will not be afraid. Well, I will be patient;" and the two moved away.

Hubert knit his brows as he met the frank, prepossessing appearance of the younger stranger, and glared with furious eyes upon his quondam English friend, who was moving along the gallery by Helen's side, talking to her with a manner which would have convinced a less acute observer of his ultimate intentions. To lose her was bad enough; but to see her wooed, and perhaps won — to be so near, and know she was utterly unconscious and unexpecting — it was enough to justify any act of madness; and for an instant he was tempted to thrust aside the crowd, and upbraid her openly that she could smile so calmly, and listen with so much interest, or that she dared receive from any other man the homage it was once his right alone to bestow. Clarendon was one whom any woman might be proud to love, and Hubert had heard woman's heart is often caught in its rebound from an unhappy attachment.

Yet he could not speak to her there for the first time. The words with which he should meet her no ear but hers must hear; and he followed at a distance, himself unseen, until they descended to their carriage. Then entering another, he promised the driver a large reward to track its predecessor to a dwelling-place; and after a long drive, he had the satisfaction of seeing Helen and the colonel enter the court of a spacious and elegant hotel. A few words to the coachman induced him to enter the *porterie*, and acquire a little further information.

"Do monsieur and mademoiselle reside here?"

"They do."

"How long will they remain?"

The porter could not tell.

"Are they at home in the evenings?"

"Monsieur sometimes goes out, but mademoiselle never."

This was sufficient, and driving back to his hotel, Hubert made himself ready for an evening visit.

When, a few hours later, Hubert entered their hotel, he inquired first for Colonel Bell. But he was absent; and not wishing to shock Helen by appearing too suddenly before her, he sent up his card, but followed close behind the servant, and waited while he went in. Through the half-open door he saw her rise suddenly as she read the name, exclaiming, in an agitated manner, —

"Where is he? Where did you find this? Who brought it?"

"Monsieur waits," said the servant; but before he had time to utter more, Hubert was at his side, and he withdrew silently.

Helen stood with her hand pressed against her heart. She desired to receive him calmly and proudly, to be self-collected and assured; but the effort was vain. Her hand dropped powerlessly, and pallid and speechless, she sank down upon the sofa. Scarcely less faint and trembling, Hubert knelt at her feet, and pressed that cold hand to his lips.

"See me in my old place," he said; "hear me ask you again the boon I entreated then — the boon I have longed for since. Tell me, have you forgiven me?"

For a little while she did not reply; and her eyes, fixed on him, expressed only such stony surprise and distress, that he was alarmed; but slowly these yielded to the sway of gentler emotions, and tears, gathering unheeded, rolled over her cheeks, as he added, earnestly, —

"Speak to me, Helen! Will you not even speak to me? Do you, then, utterly hate me?"

"O, why are you here?" she murmured, incoherently, withdrawing her hands from his, and clasping them together; "why did you come? I thought the worst was over; I thought I had suffered all; I was beginning to be less miserable; and now it is all to be endured again — the struggle, the torture, the terrible pain of parting."

"Then you have suffered! O Helen, I feared you had learned to live without me! You love me still, or you would not be thus strongly moved. We will never part again; the whole world is to me as nothing without you. Look at me, dearest; speak to me; remember all the weary months I have pined to hear your voice."

He spoke rapidly, passionately, scarcely knowing what he said; but his tone, his gesture, his beseeching eyes, aroused in her soul a fearful excitement, before which all the barriers of her strong determination were swept away. Her veins throbbed wildly, and her frame shivered with a feverish chill. The past and the future were alike forgotten in the exquisite joy which succeeded the first shock of that unexpected meeting.

"O Hubert, Hubert!" she said, slowly, holding out both hands to him. The words fell from her lips unconsciously, while her face beamed with an entranced and ardent love.

But when, seating himself beside her, he seized those hands, and would have pressed her to his heart, she repelled him, struggling feebly for a momentary firmness; and as she turned away her head, she said, in broken murmurs, "O, no, this must not be. Go; leave me; it is all in vain; other ties, other duties ——"

"What can you mean?" he exclaimed, vehemently. "What duty can separate us? Helen, tell me," — and his voice grew colder, — "have *you* formed other ties? Have I endured so many pangs, so many conflicts, only

to be trifled with and scorned at last? Have you dared to make new vows? O, what do I say? Do you, *can* you love another?"

"O, never! never!" she cried; and in sudden abandonment she threw herself upon his breast. Close in his arms he clasped her, and with caressing and gentle words he soothed the tumult of her heart and brain.

"How you frightened me, Helen, dear, when you spoke of other ties, other duties!" he said, at length. "For a moment I thought that in rashness or despair you had made some engagement which would separate us. Now we will never again be parted."

She was calm then, and made no effort to rise from her resting-place, but her voice was very firm in its low, pathetic tones, as she answered,—

"Do you then dream such happiness can be ours? It is enough to have seen you once more, to know that my confidence in you was not misplaced, to hear again words warm and earnest, like your first words of love, and to be able henceforth to forget that fearful time, when even you seemed to forsake me. O Hubert, to forget it as if it had never been, and through my lonely days to wear your image shrined within my heart,—I thank God for this; now it will not be so hard to part ——"

"Why do you speak only of parting?—of separation?" said her lover. "Your calmness and sadness terrify me. Helen, I tell you you are mine, and no power on earth shall tear you from my arms."

"It is vain," she replied, with a melancholy smile. "You are noble and generous; but we must part. And now, Hubert, it will be easier to bid you go, to tell you we must not meet again, now that I have this blessed hour to look back upon, and to live over, and to bring before my mental vision, as men who are starving are said to picture to themselves the most delicious fruits and viands. And I have other support, too, which I had not when I last saw you. Hubert, all the trials of this life appear to me far easier to be borne, since I have trusted in God and hoped in heaven. To the life which is to come I look forward with ardent longings; and I tell you this, that you may know, when you leave me, I am not left alone."

"Dearest," he murmured, with a choking of the voice, and his eyes were suffused with tears as he pressed her yet closer to his heart. Then, moved by a sudden thought, he asked,—

"Was it not of this you were thinking this afternoon, when you sat before the picture of The Assumption? I could hardly understand your expression then, but now I know what it meant."

"Did you see me?" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"I did; I was with you all the afternoon; I followed you home," Hubert answered.

"O, spy! and I knew nothing of it!" she said; and her face lighted with one of the bright, flashing smiles

which had made his pulses leap a thousand times before.

He was charmed to have surprised her into forgetfulness of her settled grief, and continued, with his eyes fixed tenderly upon her, —

"No, you did not know it. No intuition told you I was near, and my heart bursting with jealousy. O, naughty Miss Helen! I was not so unconscious when *you* were near."

"Jealousy! Pray tell me what could stir that passion."

"I was jealous of Clarendon. He loves you, Helen; but he must hope no longer, for you are mine now — my wife."

He spoke in an assured, joyous manner; but the shadow fell again over Helen's face, and she shook her head, sadly.

"Do not say that word again; it cannot be. We must part, and it is time these sad, sweet moments were ended. You know I cannot be your wife."

"Why not?"

"Why do you ask?" she replied, with an expression of deep pain. "The same objections which existed once exist now. We could not live in peace in our native land."

"Let us live elsewhere, then. I tell you, Helen, your gentler nature shall not be crushed beneath this iron load

of *duty*. And for myself, you know I am not a man to protest and swear, but I say simply, I cannot and I will not live without you. The ideas that might call for such a sacrifice do not obtain in these countries — do not pursue one to the outer edge of those distinctions which separate races. Even if your origin were known, no one here would scoff at you, and men would only envy me for the good fortune of possessing you. Helen, my darling, we can be happy here. You will find quite a different tone of public feeling from that you left across the Atlantic."

"But your home, your parents, your family," persisted Helen.

"They are mine no longer, since I cannot have both them and you. They have their prejudices — prejudices which I have shared, and therefore cannot blame them for holding so exclusively, and which I candidly admit I consider generally well founded, and entitled to respect. But you, my peerless, my beautiful, you are an exception to all rules; you make it right for a man to forsake all former opinions, and literally to obey the Scripture injunction, to leave father and mother, and cling to the wife. Before I found you in the Louvre this afternoon, I intended to return home immediately, and find you, and tell you what I have told you now. I have lived six months without you, I have tried what time could do, I have heard all arguments, and to this resolve I had come

deliberately. You love me; I hoped, I believed it still, in spite of your coldness in leaving me so ill, and in refusing to answer my letter."

"Your letter! I received none! Have you been ill?"

"Did you not know it? O Helen, I am glad! That was all I blamed you for!" he cried, with eager joy. "I was very ill at the time you left Mrs. Avenel's, and for a long time after. I could not wonder you accompanied your brother, but I was surprised you should never send to inquire for me, or reply to my letter. They told me there was no message from you."

"There was none," said Helen, sadly, "for I received no letter, and was not informed of your illness. They were determined to separate us, and knowing this, can I, ought I, to accept your love — to allow this sacrifice?"

"There is but one thing which can be a sacrifice to me, and that is, to give you up. O, my best beloved, you are more to me than kindred or home, more than life itself. There is no joy but to be with you, no sorrow which you cannot lighten." And as he spoke, he caught her again to his heart. She yielded. Her womanly nature could not but yield to the force of that earnest, manly love; but when gazing earnestly into the fond eyes bent upon her, she murmured, hesitatingly, —

"Can this be right? O Hubert, if you should live to regret it!"

He quelled the lingering doubt and fear, by ans ," playfully, yet earnestly,—

"If it never was right before, and never will be again, we *will make it right for this once.* I will be to you the beau ideal of a husband, and you shall be to me such a wife, that no mortal, in witnessing our perfect happiness, shall dream of whispering, in his most secret thoughts, that word *regret.*"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVENTH.

"O thoughtless lassie, life's a faught;
  Tho canniest gate, the strife is sair;
But aye fu' hau't is fechtin best,
  An' hungry care's an unco care;
But some will spend, and some will spare,
  An' wilfu' folk maun hae their will;
Syne as ye brew, my maiden fair,
  Keep mind that ye maun drink the yill."

In the southland the summers come and go, the flowers bloom and fade; and during the sleep of nature, the brown leaves fall before the rushing rain; and slowly, steadily, surely, the unchanging pulse of Time throbs onward to its death hour. But in that land of sunshine lives one to whom, through day and night, the hours seem to falter and stand still.

She lives in a stately mansion, situated on the slope of a green valley, surrounded with fruits and flowers, and extensive pleasure grounds, and paths that lead through shady places to pleasant bowers; and all which can delight the eye or charm the sense seems gathered there. But the house is of stone, and the windows have heavy gratings; and though the doors stand ever open, and no word of restraint is breathed to any of its inmates, the moment any one steps outside its walls another person joins her,

walks beside her, follows her untiringly, with a quick eye to mark each motion, and a strong arm to prevent escape from this *espionage;* and should these pleasant paths be followed to their bound, one would find a wide level space between the trees and a high brick wall, which encloses all the domain. Inside the house are books in profusion, musical instruments, rich furniture and paintings, all that cultivated and refined life demands; and the groups who move through the halls or loiter in the rooms, singing, chatting, or engaged in some light, feminine employment, might appear at first glance to be happy in their retreat from the world. One almost wonders what should cause the alert, watchful expression in the eyes of those of them who seem to play the part of host and hostess, and the half-concealed unhappiness and secret fear which a little attention can discover in the faces of their guests. But listen, and you will find that mirth fitful and unintelligent, that conversation babbling wildly through the most contradictory and absurd ideas, and the gloom and tears which often follow equally causeless and unnatural, and in some countenances the fierce look of determination which indicates a dangerous insanity. These are they to whom the most constant vigilance is directed, and who often disappear from their companions behind a strong iron door, that shuts off a distant part of the house; from whence sometimes wild shrieks or muffled cries are heard, or yells and curses that chill the listener's blood with horror.

But she who curses oftenest curses silently. She marks

the sun rise and set behind the circling forest, from whose dark bound her weary eyes turn, loathing the light, which reveals the barrier that shuts her up in more complete solitude and isolation from the inhabited world.

Yet when the night comes darkling over the gardens and the lonely house, and one by one the lights go out in the various windows, a deeper gloom, a more intense desolation, broods over her spirit, and she waters her prayerless couch with tears of despairing rage. She mingles little in the society which the family affords, and takes no interest in the fancied joys or woes that overcloud the diseased minds of her fellow-sufferers. She smiles in bitter scorn at their puerile cares and fears, and thrills with shuddering dread at the gibbering cries which sometimes reach her ears ; for there is a dark foreboding in her soul that she may one day pass behind the bolted door into the corridor of the iron-furnished cells.

Yet haughty and unyielding as ever, she will do nothing to avert such a fate. She talks but little to the kind-hearted matron, who pities and would amuse her ; and she will not go often into the garden or the parlors, for only in her own room can she hope to be alone. She is quiet now, and yields a sullen obedience to the rules of the house, so far as they are enforced in her case, and troubles no one with outcries or complaints ; yet there was a time, when she first entered this mansion, she spared them no means of annoyance, and used every argument, every entreaty, every wild and desperate endeavor to escape.

But when, at length, she came to personal violence, and really, for a time, insane with fear and anger, attempted the life of her attendant, she was brought under the strict regimen of the hospital: her beautiful hair was shaved, her limbs confined in a strait jacket of strong *silk*, her food was prison diet, — none the more palatable that it was served on silver and china from her own dwelling, — and for weeks she wore around her delicate wrists bracelets which denied her the use of her hands. They had been provided by Colonel Bell, when he was told of her unhappy state, and as if in mockery of her love of ornament, they were of *gilded* iron.

Her chamber is furnished magnificently, and her wardrobe complete as if she were daily receiving crowds of visitors. New music and new novels, as they appear in the market, are sent to her; even new dresses, and laces, and sets of jewelry arrive from time to time by her husband's order. He says it is from a desire to afford her every indulgence consistent with safe keeping; but if he meant it for a bitter sarcasm, he could not devise one that would be more deeply felt. Sometimes, when these gifts are opened, she spits upon them and tears them; sometimes she sends them back, or bids them be packed again and put away until she leaves her prison. But she is growing less and less hopeful that that time will ever come, and she is losing her interest in dressing herself finely, and trying to preserve her beauty. Her hair has

grown out thin and coarse, and wrinkles are becoming indelible on her brow and cheek. Poor Clara Bell! From the Bible her mother sent her she turns away in proud and unbelieving rebellion; and what other hope or comfort is left for her in life!

In their pleasant home, Edgar Avenel and his noble wife enjoy all of happiness which this world can bestow. If there are anxieties and griefs in that home, if there are heart achings and tears, they are only such as are inseparable from humanity — soft summer showers, which, though they cloud the sky a little while, are necessary to moisten the soil which too much sunshine might render hard and sterile. Honored and beloved by all, their lives flew on serenely, in unostentatious goodness and charity towards all mankind.

Thank God, there are many such families scattered up and down among the hills and valleys of our native land, the sum of whose daily existence, unknown and unrecorded of Fame, it takes not many words to tell; yet from them shall go forth sons and daughters, whose influence in the "good time coming," shall be powerful to shield our country from the ruin with which it is menaced by the deeds of evil men.

Sometimes there is seen by this fireside a quiet gentleman, the expression of whose features, slightly touched with melancholy, and his raven locks sprinkled over with

gray hairs, tell more of sorrow than of years. Yet it is a gentle and holy sorrow, not obtrusive and complaining, but worn rather as a shield against the evil and folly of the world — a sacred amulet, the gift of one who has passed beyond the skies.

To the oppressed children of his mother's race Charles Dupré is at once an example and a missionary. To some his life work seems humble; but he has studied the subject in its true bearings, having in view not what these degraded people are, but what they are capable of becoming; and in devoting himself to the labor of raising them, through religion and education, he cares not for the scorn of those who have neither the capacity to understand, nor the feeling to appreciate his motives. He has had many trials even from those for whom he labors — there have been moments when his heart has fainted within him; but he has found also good and true helpers, noble men who have bid him God speed, and given him substantial aid for his schools and his churches; and in watching the slow development of the ideas he is implanting, he experiences a quiet joy, and for his reward he looks to the great future of eternity. Of Julie and of her early death he never speaks, but his silence is not sullen or misanthropic. In the secret chamber of his soul there is a veiled image, clothed in saintly white, before which the flame of an undying love burns bright and clear; and to none but the compassionate eye of God can his hand ever open the portals of that sacred shrine.

There is another home, in which Charles Dupré is ever a welcome guest. Directly opposite Edgar Avenel's mansion, so near that the glad young voices can in summer be plainly heard there, and in winter the cheery firelight almost casts its glow upon the window, stands a small but elegant cottage, within whose quiet bounds his step-mother has established herself, to spend the remainder of her days. With her pliant and trustful disposition, it was easy to convince her that her daughter was really in the unfortunate condition which Colonel Bell had alleged, as a reason for her sudden disappearance; and when she had gone with him to the retreat he had provided, and heard the physician's opinion of her case, she made no further opposition to their refusal to allow her an interview with Clara.

Indeed, after her first dismay and distress had subsided, it was almost a relief to think that the strange and malicious traits which she had noticed in Clara's character were the result of a diseased brain, rather than the outworking of a depraved heart. The coldness and unkindness of word and deed, over which she had privately mourned when manifested towards herself and those in whom she was interested; the bursts of anger and cruelty towards her helpless servants, which were beginning to be known and commented upon in the neighborhood, and through her own domestics had reached her ears; the vanity and selfishness which every year seemed to strengthen; the scornful repugnance to religious truth — all the poisonous

and hateful weeds which, overgrowing the soil of Clara's heart, had choked the seeds a mother's hand once implanted there, she could now think of with sorrowful and pitying excuses, for the mental malady had warped a nature that might otherwise have been pure and lovely.

For some months she remained in her old home, going occasionally, and sending often, to inquire for her daughter's health; but the report continued unfavorable, and she was never allowed to see her; and at length beginning to believe her case was as they reported, incurable, she, with the submission which had become a habit, resigned herself to the direction of others.

Mr. Avenel had for many years been urging her to give up the establishment at the Pines, and locate herself near them, if she did not choose to accept a home in his family. She wished to retain the servants who had spent their lives with her, and with these she removed to the cottage which was built by her desire. Her husband's will had been such that all the other human beings belonging to the estate passed into Clara's possession at his death; and Colonel Bell with alacrity aided the widow to settle her affairs in the south, and prepare for a residence near her other children. He had been uniformly polite to her; and now he seemed so kind, so sympathetic, and anxious for her comfort, that she reproached herself for having allowed Clara's representations to prejudice her against him. His conscience reproved him somewhat for the

deception he was practising upon her simple-hearted credulity; but he excused himself by thinking that with Edgar and his family she would be far happier than she could be if left, in her declining years, to the scanty kindness which was the utmost Clara's nature could bestow.

And in fact this is the case. The mother's heart cannot forget her child, and she writes constantly to Clara, and thinks of her daily, with pity and with prayers. But Edgar had been to her from childhood scarcely less dear than Clara, and always had repaid her love with more affectionate regard; and now, after years of separation, her tenderness, so long repressed and chilled by those who should most have cherished it, — her husband and her child, — flows forth to find itself welcomed and blessed by hearts as warm as her own. The children, who are as much at home with her as in their father's house, call to her face such smiles as have not lingered there since the happy days of her girlhood; and amid such tender and watchful affection she is repaid for many an hour of anxiety and trial.

Ned Conant is growing up, mirthful and fun-loving as when a boy; but his free and manly nature scorns the trammels which will make his father all his days a slave to worldliness. If he is too independent and somewhat reckless in his exuberant youth, it is a comfort to know that

"E'en his failings lean to virtue's side,"

and are but the rebound from the maxims of timidity and time-serving which his childhood heard.

Mrs. Conant never recovered from the shock of Julie's death. Her husband has grown bitter and more desperately prejudiced against men of color, and will not allow Charles Dupré's name mentioned in his presence; but she contrives to hear of him through Ned's constant friendship, and sometimes sends him, secretly, little tokens of her interest in his welfare. But she has not courage to espouse the cause in which he is engaged, or even to speak of him; and she wears always a sad and troubled expression; and not even Nellie's gay young life can cast any joy over hers, as she sits in the shadow of the tomb where her favorite child lies buried.

By the shores of the tideless sea, beneath the purple skies of Italy, Hubert Warner has made his home with the bride he won so dearly; and never has he regretted that for her sake he relinquished his father's house and his native land. Years have proved that she who could inspire this devoted affection possessed the still greater power to retain it, with its enthusiasm undiminished, its delicate bloom unfaded, amid the cares and uses of common life. For it is thus that love is tested. In this daily friction of minute events the true diamond is but polished to a clearer lustre; the false jewel becomes defaced and dim, and at length is worn away.

Happy in each other and their children, they seldom care to leave their grove-embowered villa; but old friends now and then find them out in their seclusion, and a gradually-widening circle of congenial and cultivated families are ever ready to welcome them when they visit the neighboring city. There Colonel Bell has fixed his residence; but in reality he spends most of his time in the villa which he purchased and presented to Helen on her wedding day, and where he delights to surround her with all that can minister to her comfort, or gratify her love of the beautiful. He finds much, also, to interest him in the literary labors wherein Hubert employs himself, and there is a prospect that their diligent researches may result in some valuable contributions to antiquarian lore.

They see few Americans, and seldom refer to the land they have left; partly because then only does a frown gather on Hubert's brow, and a deep sadness, not unmixed with stronger and harsher feelings, overspread the features of Colonel Bell, and partly because, like all persons really contented and absorbed with their surroundings and occupations, they live in the present, and the past does not often intrude itself upon their thoughts. Once or twice Charles Dupré has rested from the wearing duties of his life, in beholding his sister's happiness, and for a few years they have had occasional visits from young Henry Lane, who, being unable to obtain admittance to the best colleges of his native country, was obliged to come to the old world in order to gain the advantages of education

which he desired. His early manhood is rich with promise, and all who know him are astonished at the purity and strength of character, and the keen, comprehensive intellect which every year develops more fully.

It has been his intention to return to the United States when his studies are completed; but recently he has received letters urging him to go to Liberia, where scientific and thoroughly-educated physicians are much needed; and as he is fitting for that profession, his presence there might be of inestimable value. Probably he will accede to the request, and locate himself there for a few years, even if he should not decide upon a permanent residence.

The Warners still live in comfort on the "old plantation," managing their domestic affairs in the same easy and cheerful manner that distinguished them of old. Hubert is to them as one dead, and his name is rarely mentioned. But time has somewhat healed their first deep mortification at his marriage; and since his absence causes him to be forgotten by their acquaintance, so that his relatives are not annoyed by being continually reminded of his disgrace, they can afford to mingle a little pity with the acerbity of tone wherewith they sometimes, in the home circle, refer to "poor Hubert," who so foolishly threw himself away. The early ties which bound him to his brothers and sisters had for years been somewhat loosened, as, one after another, they married and removed

to new scenes and interests; for, absorbed in their own families, they had little time to think of him. Mr. and Mrs. Warner have other children, who are the pride and blessing of their declining years, and numerous grandchildren, to whom the old home is the Mecca of an annual pilgrimage; beside Emma and Angie, who, beautiful and affectionate, richly repay the care lavished upon their infancy. In such a large family the loss of one is but little felt, and the only thing which might remind an observer of these leaves they would so willingly tear from the record of their lives, is the constant violence with which Mr. Warner inveighs against educating persons of color, and the significant shrug and the impatient exclamation wherewith his wife receives the intelligence that any of her neighbors employ a northern lady as governess.

Clara Bell is represented to all as hopelessly insane. Colonel Bell, having determined to remain abroad, leased his patrimonial acres to his sister's children, who would inherit them, and sold all his other property. Marise, Mrs. Bell's maid, thus brought under the hammer of the auctioneer, was bought by a Florida planter, and her after fate is uncertain. Jim, in consideration of his faithfulness and affection, received his freedom and a present of money sufficient to establish him in trade, and he is now settled in Baltimore, doing a flourishing business in candy, gingerbread, and peanuts.

Michel, being left in possession of his own freedom when Hubert Warner gave up his connection with his

father's mercantile affairs in Cuba, soon succeeded in amassing a sum sufficient to purchase Kissy, and together they removed to Hayti, where they now live in opulence. The diminutive 'Gus, having turned out to be a veritable dwarf, continues an inmate of his master's family; and having, by this kindness of nature, escaped the doom of labor, he leads a merry and useless existence, unless, indeed, he may be thought to earn, as Mrs. Warner says, "the salt to his porridge" by the good he does in the hearty laughter his pranks often occasion. The spice of malice in his disposition strengthens with increasing years; but he acquires, also, sufficient wisdom to reserve it for those on whom it can be safely expended. To the white members of the household he appears only as a nimble, docile, and grotesque pet, and if others dare complain of him he always triumphs in the contest, and then repays the daring by the most provoking piece of mischief he can invent.

"Mother Goose" still supplies him with an unfailing fund of proverbs and stories, which he brings forward and dispenses as lavishly as of yore; delighting the "little nigs," and the juveniles of a higher grade, with a description of the detection and summary punishment which befell "Tom, the piper's son," after his thieving attempt upon his neighbor's pigsty; or the history of "Jack Horner's" Christmas dinner, when, like many another selfish mortal, he uttered a vainglorious boast, as if he had accomplished something praiseworthy in appropriating to himself the

biggest plum in the family pie; or the wonderful tale of the three philosophers of Gotham, who, venturing to sea in a vessel of novel construction, were drowned; probably, if one may judge from the rashness of their last act, without having effected any life assurance for the benefit of their disconsolate relatives.

But his favorite among these immortal poems is that of the old woman — doubtless some reputed witch of the times of Chief Justice Hale or Cotton Mather — who, being tossed with her broomstick in a blanket, "seventy times as high as the moon," showed how a brave soul can take advantage of circumstances, and answered the hootings of the mob by a prophetic assurance that she would "sweep the cobwebs out of the sky."

The children laugh at the joke and heed not the allegory; but he who looks thoughtfully down the vista of the past can see how, one by one, the ideas that darkened the mental firmament have been torn away, and the closed nooks, where dust and cobwebs gather, laid open to the light of truth. Yet, alas! the old woman sweeps slowly. Heaven speed her work!